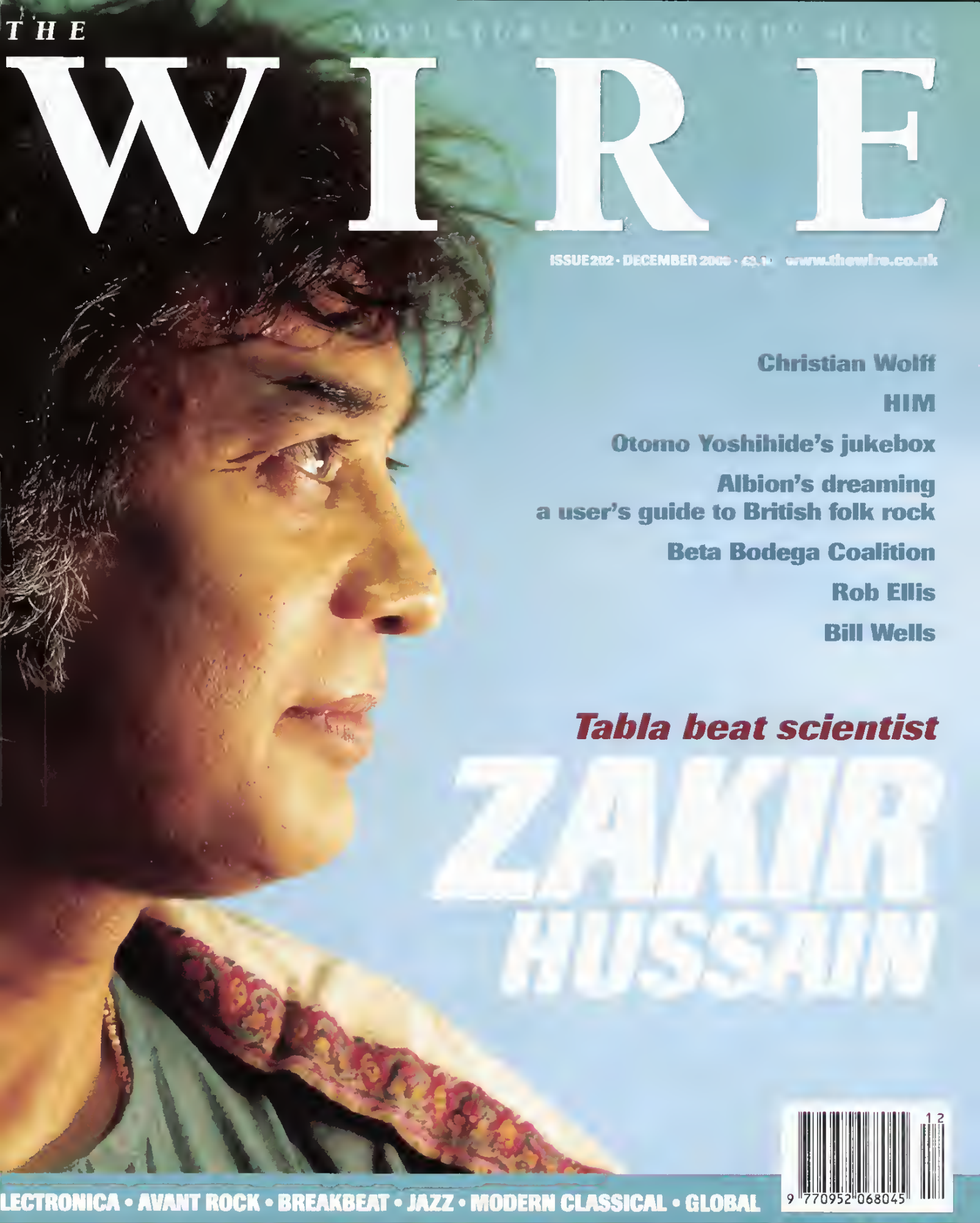


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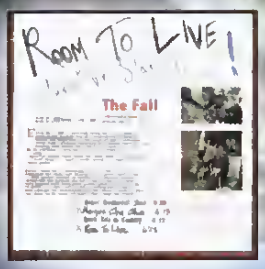
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THE WIRE
ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

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editor's idea

Winter floods towards us, bringing with it a sudden deluge of live music for which it has been worth braving the tempestuous conditions. In the past month or so, I was one of few people who found Faust's live accompaniment to FW Murnau's black and white vampyre fest *Nosferatu* utterly engrossing: appropriately sinister and unwilling to let go of the throat. Musicians willing to whip up a 'concert soundtrack' are two a penny these days, but where so many seem poorly prepared, Faust appeared to inhabit each frame of the movie, with Zappi Neumeier even declaiming the script and screaming warnings at the onscreen characters. I was also lucky enough to witness Anti-Pop Consortium in person for the first time in Huesca, a remote town in the foothills of the Spanish Pyrenees. The way the New York trio energises a room using the most minimal means, with a Babelised torrent of text and broken beats from a couple of old rhythm boxes, is miraculous.

At this point, on admittedly circumstantial evidence, the live circuit appears to be polarising into extremes of spectacle and anti-spectacle: the contrast between Faust's fireworks and, say, the unobtrusive numbercrunching of computer muso Nobukazu Takemura, witnessed at the Elektronikaldia Festival in Donostia-San Sebastian at the end of September. Where some observers like to pit one against the other, we should take eternal delight in these enormous gear changes of scale and energy.

Two nights of the current London Jazz Festival, one after another, illustrated another pair of contrasts. Australia's The Necks made their UK debut: the gossamer-lite rhythm tracery of this drums/grand piano/double bass trio accumulates interminably, under strictly controlled conditions: the lengthy pieces they spin out so diligently are linear in the extreme. And although they can work up a whirring dynamic that the Can of *Future Days* might have been proud of, it takes them what seems like an eternity to get there. Each modulation appears added as part of a controlled, evolving process rather than unleashed by any sudden flare of inspiration. After one number, you get the drift: they start small, build up to a peak, and then bring it oh-so-slowly down to a fade out. Cue an applause that has a markedly similar character to the relieved clapping that tends to ripple round aeroplane cabins after a slightly rocky touchdown.

By contrast, the following night, the same Purcell Room stage was occupied by the Norwegian quartet Supersilent — the second of *The Wire*'s Live Sessions nights at the South Bank. Making their own first appearance on a British stage, this group's modus operandi is essentially similar to that of The Necks — and, indeed, to any group, from AMM onwards, that hears the first tiny squeaks and taps emitted by their instruments as germs out of which a universe can grow. Yet where The Necks act as gentle cultivators, nurturing the progress of their pieces, Supersilent are catastrophists: they have no trouble splitting the ground open to swallow several minutes of cheek-sucking micro-events — tortuous, gnarly thudding and squeaking — with an avalanche of rumbling drum thunderbolts, searing noise-spikes from flaming-brand samplers, and sub-bass Moog theophany. The Necks' systems Improv seeks to guide you safely down to Earth. Supersilent want to make you fall into it.

Maybe it's because our nerves are all a-jangle as another exhausting year draws to a close, but I suspect that the dominant mood of next month's Critics' Choice will be one of hope for a dose of such catastrophism to vibe up the alternative music nation. Meanwhile *The Wire* hopes our British readers manage to avoid any floods during the Christmas season. We'll be back, right after the break.

ROB YOUNG

The January 2001 issue of *The Wire* will be on sale on

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Nitzsche picking

Very heartening to see *The Wire* quick on the uptake in eulogising the late Jack Nitzsche (*The Wire* 200) Reading Ian Penman's appreciation, I was reminded of how difficult it is to actually describe the music itself Metaphors for Nitzsche's work abound, as found in the song lyrics and film scenes completed by his signature arrangements, yet the stuff of his actual music remains elusive

It is all too easy to miss the innovative presence and cast Jack Nitzsche as an eccentric with a romantic bent, the guy who assigned a French horn instead of a Fender Stratocaster for the lead in his instrumental hit single, "The Lonely Surfer" He wrote the charts for the multiple orchestras behind producer Phil Spector's many hits, but the extent to which that experience imprinted Nitzsche's later work should be further examined More than any other arranger, he understood the need to integrate the dots on the manuscript paper with the sonic possibilities afforded by modern recording technology Not content with articulating a darker emotional palette, it was obvious that he yearned to describe the climates and landscapes implicit in his music The high lonesome sound of his string sections, every one a masterpiece of microphone placement, is the first testament to this agenda, as was Nitzsche's early enthusiasm for electronics (sparked, as Penman notes, by his hiring Beaver & Krause to play Moog synthesizer on the *Performance* soundtrack) His work on Neil Young's "Expecting To Fly" and "Broken Arrow" mixed sound collage with studio atmospherics, more than equal to the wizardry conjured by engineer Roy Halee for Simon And Garfunkel records from the same period Nitzsche's electromania could wax baroque, as with the group he assembled for an early 80s Canadian tour by his then-wife Buffy Sainte-Marie seven keyboards, ranging from Fender Rhodes piano to Synclavier (with the lot given a live mix by Canadian Ambienteur Michael Brook) For all of his techno-lust, Nitzsche never lost sight of what constituted the core of a great performance

I share Penman's view that *Cutter's Way* was the apex of Nitzsche's accomplishments, both as an author of film music and as a composer, full stop This unsettling and poignant music was perhaps the best evocation of what Nitzsche once described as the emotions living in the cracks between the piano keys The score was written for a quixotic and terrifyingly effective ensemble, comprising glass harmonica, harpsichord, bowed saw and The Armin Family's electric string quartet. Recorded by a then-unknown Daniel Lanois at his Grant Avenue Studios, the sessions for Nitzsche's score introduced Lanois's name to a larger public before Brian Eno entered the picture Between the cloudiness of a Harry Partch tone poem and a mariachi band's brassy sentimentality, Nitzsche carved a space in which


Lonely surfer: Jack Nitzsche

courage, tragedy and suicidal pluck could coexist. Incidentally, Leo Kottke's self-titled 1977 debut on Chrysalis works as a companion volume for the *Cutter's Way* score In a better world this would have been billed as a duo effort, so integral are Nitzsche's arrangements to the album's form and mien And always, the sound of his strings, so unique even when playing deceptively simple unison lines strings were Nitzsche's sonic thumbprint, every bit as immediately recognisable from the very first note as a mid-70s Lee Perry production

The possibility of a retrospective box set was mentioned I do hope that this materialises Most of Nitzsche's best film work made fleeting appearances in the soundtrack bins or not at all, as was the case with, I suspect, *Cutter's Way* Throughout his later career, Nitzsche was often typecast musically by his affiliation with the 'girl group' sound of the early 60s Yet his incidental music for *The Exorcist*, overshadowed by director William Friedkin's needle-drop of *Tubular Bells*, should be considered in the same very short list of electronic 'out' scores that includes Louis and Bebe Barron's *Forbidden Planet* Nitzsche's idea of musique concrete, as created for the film by singer/songwriter/ceramics artist Ron Nagle, is the stuff of a full article in and of itself Should the career-in-a-box set eventually appear, it will have the taint of a traffic light erected only in the wake of a fatal accident Nitzsche deserved such commemoration during his time on the planet, rather than the tabloid notoriety he accrued with drugs and gunplay For all the talk of his self-destructive impulses and affiliations with celebrities, Jack Nitzsche was still best characterised by the costume chosen by this quintessential 'behind the curtain' talent for a Hollywood Halloween party his face wrapped in gauze, he had come as the Invisible Man

Richard Henderson *San Anselmo, USA*

PHOTO REDFERNS

200) Finally, I'd discovered something that catered to my musical tastes I look forward to your next issue and, indeed, your next Wire Session

Andrew Burree *Windelsham, Surrey*

See this month's Out There for details — Ed

Cold is the Metal

I just want to add my two cents to the debate on Heavy Metal I guess I can see other people's views on the matter, but the appeal that Metal has held for me since hearing Iron Maiden at the age of 13 is based almost entirely on its lowbrow status I can appreciate Jennifer Hor's points (Letters, *The Wire* 200) as well as the parallels between Norwegian Black Metal and Hermann Nitsch, but a line has to be drawn somewhere Whereas releases such as Trey Azagthoth's criminally unavailable *Love Of Lava*, and records by Discordance Axis, Burzum Cave-In, Enslaved, Esoteric, etc, deserve better consideration, to drag their music screaming into the cold light of *The Wire* can only dim their evil luminosity! Yet there's a clear line between 'experimental' Metal such as the Francisco Lopez CD on Alien8 and evil filth like Darkthrone Just let me get my Metal kicks from trash like *Terrorizer* and *Metal Maniacs* it's a sordid pleasure, but it's what I do It would be a shame for Metal to suffer the same fate as HipHop dragged out of the 'hood (well, OK, a dank, dimly lit teenage bedroom) by beard stroking intellectuals

Chay Lawrence *Chicago, USA*

Round your way

As a US subscriber since 1997, I was delighted to see my hometown Hamtramck mentioned in Peter Shapiro's review of Le Car's *Auto-Biography* (*The Wire* 200), which refers to Paycheck's, the boozy Metal club where skinny-tie-wearing, post-New Romantic Techno-popsters like Le Car stood out from Detroit's grungy unwashed in the mid-1990s Today they'd feel more comfortable down the street at Entropy or Motor, where Detroit Techno has found a homebase In recent months, Chris Cutler, Francisco Lopez, Thomas Brinkmann, Stewart Walker, Kit Clayton Pluramon, Kid606 Funkstorung, Datach'i and LTJ Bukem, as well as locals Carl Craig, Richie Hawtin, Kevin Saunderson, Theorem and Ectomorph, have performed here

I appreciate your global coverage of 'adventures in modern music — but I get a special thrill when it can be experienced within walking distance of my home!

Walter Wasacz *Hamtramck, USA*

Corrections

Issue 201 The review of the Organ Of Corti label's reissue of Cornelius Cardew/The Scratch Orchestra's *The Great Learning* failed to make clear that the cover art was a facsimile of the sleeve of Deutsche Grammophon's original vinyl edition The review also didn't make clear that the CD booklet reproduces extracts from Cardew's graphic score

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Roger Turner

Drumming in tongues

Percussionist Roger Turner is one of the 'second generation' free improvisors who arrived in the wake of Derek Bailey, Tony Oxley and Evan Parker. His precision, speed and nervosity are legendary. Recently, he's been touring with Thomas Lehn and Tim Hodgkinson as Konk Pack, revelling in volume, sampled grotesques and squiggling synths. Having worked with Phil Minton's Dada vocalese and Martin Klapper's toys, he views all instruments as legitimate, laptops included.

"Sure, it's four boiled eggs sitting behind a piece of plastic with wires coming out," he says, "but some of the boiled eggs move differently from others. [Composer] Richard Barrett is very physical when he plays the Powerbook, fantastic stuff. Josef Novotny in Austria almost doesn't have to play, he looks so impenetrably still — he wears black clothes, looks like a Martian. My thing is whether I like the sound or not, whether it gives things out I can work with."

Born in 1946, Turner grew up in Canterbury. He recalls Richard Sinclair and the early incarnation of Soft Machine, The Wilde Flowers. He was lucky to have older brothers who were hip to the New Thing in jazz: his first live concert was the Coltrane Quartet with Eric Dolphy; he saw Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington three or four times, Art Blakey, Jimmy Giuffre... At the age of 13, he was listening to Ornette Coleman's *Change Of The Century*. "I loved that music immediately," he says, "I didn't think about it, it was what was there. I felt that was their music, I couldn't imitate it. Those guys created it, so for me it was important to let something else grow."

Turner also pursued Hendrix and The Who, ska, bluebeat and James Brown. In 1968, he toured with the experimental Ritual Theatre. In 1972, he recorded as part of Company for a BBC Radio 3 broadcast. Incus's 32nd release was his duo with saxophonist Gary Todd, *Sunday Best*. Turner's virtues blossomed in work with vocalists — Annette Peacock, Phil Minton and Vanessa Mackness. His clever choice of sound colours is so speedy, his motifs often resemble the voice. Do such skills help him deal with the effects of new technology?

"You're not going to get much faster than voice improvisors," he responds. "The speed with which change can be made and articulated is really something most instrumentalists are not going to get to. If you've played with people like that and once they're in the sound arena, you've got to take that into account."

Does he think musicians favour new tools to avoid the weight of history represented by violins and guitars? "Absolutely. It really does loosen it up. It's how I felt when vocalists started to be prominent in improvisation. It really loosened things up, because they weren't singing songs and they weren't free jazz musicians and you were able to get a whole other aspect."

Turner's pad in West London is full of bizarre percussion instruments. It's also packed with records and tapes. Although he has an improvisor's commitment to playing live, he's quite prepared to learn from records. "I had a shocking encounter with Chinese Qin music," he relates. "It coincided with obtaining a Meazzi pedal tom, made by an Italian company. This opened up all kinds of things that have actually been explored by jazz drummers always — merging sound and line. Right from the early days, if you listen to Chauncy Morhouse and Vic Berton playing with [Miff] Mole or Bix Beiderbecke, the cymbal work is all to do with rhythm and line fusing. In modern jazz, Max Roach and Ed Blackwell were exploring that. When I found this pedal tom-tom it gave me the opportunity to explore non-propulsive line playing.

"[The pedal] alters the pitch. You can play a kind of melody. You can step across the great divide. One of the great joys of improvising is that melody instruments can explore rhythmic approaches and vice versa, you can move the boundaries quite radically... and explore single-surface playing. That coincided with hearing Qin music and also Steve Lacy playing solo soprano. The clarity of line and the cutting away of ornament really appealed to me."

One of Turner's latest projects is a trio with two German musicians — trumpeter Birgit Ulher and bassist Ulrich Phillipp, which recently released a CD called *Umlaut*. The latter's plucked bass has a rich, thrilling sound, integrating jazz twang with the others' serialist chirps and flutters in a striking way: drum 'n' bass improv that doesn't get stuck in catatonic loops. Working with a woman is also important. Turner understands the reasons for the new chill among continental players (impatience with the macho bellowing associated with FMP), though he's wary of style choices that might hamper freedom.

"The interesting thing for me is that once it's done, it's assimilated into an improvising vocabulary," he explains. "The danger is that it remains static and that's what you do for evermore — it's just a style, and you get these cosmetic improvisors who are like designer armchairs that slot in somewhere."

As the avant gestures of yesteryear stand bottled and ready for invoice on a plethora of 'new' labels, it's heartening to be reminded of what the struggle for musical freedom is really about. **BEN WATSON** *Birgit Ulher/Ulrich Phillip/Roger Turner's* Umlaut *is out now on Numichtnur*

Rob Ellis

Ideals of beauty

Could it be that Rob Ellis drew one of Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's Oblique Strategies cards — "Honour thy errors as hidden intentions" — in the process of making his *Music For The Home*? The album started life as a grouping of solo piano pieces (Ellis cheerfully admits his status as an amateur pianist) that, over a period of six years, grew into something completely different. Its lengthy gestation is down to Ellis's fulltime role as drummer and producer of PJ Harvey's group, not to mention his former extracurricular activities: his solo project Spleen, and occasional spells as a percussionist in Laika. The new album's subtitle, *Instrumental, Mechanical And Electronic Music 1994–1999*, is a clue to its provenance — Ellis locates the disc's 21 tracks within his longstanding fascination for early 20th century repertoire.

Not least, *Music For The Home* serves notice to quit on anyone tempted to pigeonhole him. Composed of singular mood turns, the album's blurred blend of organic and synthetic sound covers a lot of ground — freeform jazz rhythms are played out on typewriters, while serialist tone rows and colourful, Debussy-style spaces emphasise the organisational powers gone into the CD. Yet its overarching spirit, in terms of tonality and spirit, is of Olivier Messiaen. "Well," says Ellis, "Messiaen's approach to structure was personal to him, and based on much more universal themes of religion and nature. I've come from the point of view of someone who's always loved that music, not just Messiaen, but Satie, Ravel, Stravinsky, right through to Britten and Boulez. They have always influenced me, and in one way, this is a fan's response to their music. The thematic line is my own personal love affair with their work."

While fan-inspired homages are not unknown, what distinguishes Ellis's work is the impact of his idol on his music's structure. "I hesitate to say it, but 'beauty' is the first word I'd use", he says. A pause, then an emphatic reiteration. "Yes, beauty. That may sound a bit odd based on the Spleen recordings, but the idea of this album was to pursue the mystery and beauty that can be found in music. These were major preoccupations, and ones people shouldn't be afraid of."

Such thinking also extended to his recent work with PJ Harvey. Immediately after finishing *Music For The Home*, Ellis travelled from his Somerset home to the Milton Keynes studio where the two Harveys, Polly and co-producer Mick (of The Bad Seeds), were waiting for him. "The three of us were at some kind of crossroads. We had been talking about beauty and how we would apply it to [her album] *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea*, and not be afraid of it. We all went to see *American Beauty* when we were making the record. First of all, we loved the soundtrack music, but also the film seemed to be about something much bigger than the simple subject matter of the story. We couldn't put our finger on what it was. Beauty is this quality you get from something that's somehow mysterious."

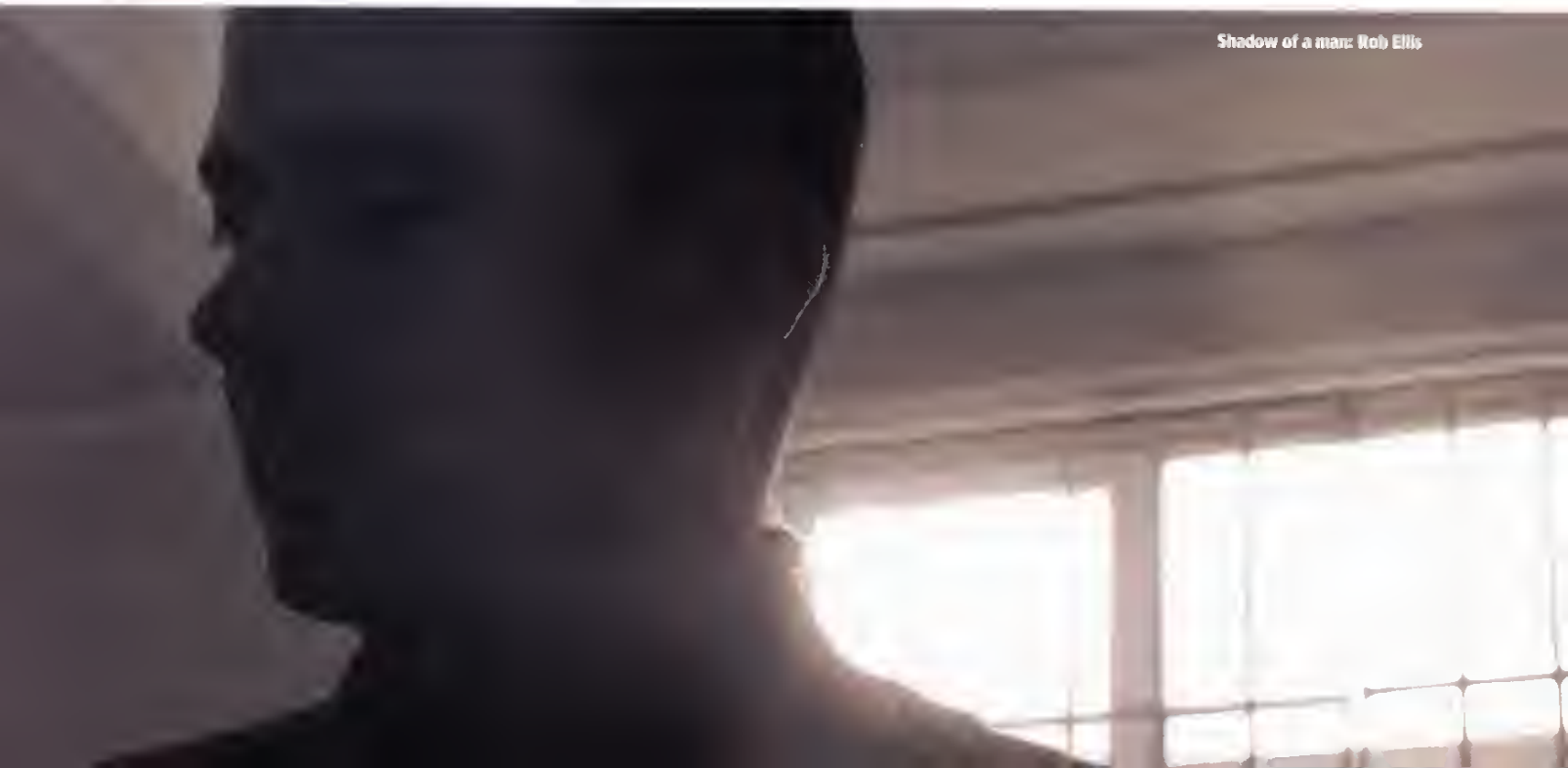
Moving from the abstract to the more tangible, Ellis hit on various ways to structure the material on his own album. The opening track "Out Of It" is a tantalising series of hints built around a recording of Britten's *Nocturnal After John Dowland* played by guitarist Michael Partington. Elsewhere, layers of electronic sound shift and refocus the listener's attention and, in the process, open up a series of faultlines through which a track's history can be excavated. "It's a crime thriller idea," Ellis offers. "You can make tenuous links, themed links and obscure ones. You can talk about intentionality or the lack of it. Sometimes, out of this messy layer of sound a piece of music suddenly reveals itself."

At other times, he returned to ideas of proportion, making use of medieval (and later) concepts of the geometric organisation of music. He praises Xenakis's stochastic method and, separately, serialism. He is attracted as much by their rigour as the emotional warmth he finds therein. But a book about Debussy and proportion, by an Italian mathematician, triggered his numerical sequences. For "Towards Dust Spiral Section", Ellis spent two months number-crunching his way towards an end. "It was my one experiment with total abstraction. I put nothing of myself into it. I wanted to see what would happen," he says. "The notes I chose for the sequence were based on this escalation of numbers. I was off the calculator scale before I found the last note. It was absurd. I was actually going through a very bad period in my life at the time, and I reacted by being totally emotionally cold and sitting there programming numbers. I don't think I would ever do it again. It was totally obsessional."

And that's the balance of it. *Music For The Home* makes some brave admissions, something that accentuates its admixture of strength and vulnerability. Above all, it's a collection of pieces that bears extended listening on multiple levels, as a way of integrating music with social space — the fullest and most original definition and realisation of Ambient sound. The next day, Ellis calls to tell me, "I heard on a Radio 3 documentary that most people listen to contemporary classical music while they're doing housework. You know, dusting and ironing." He sounds pleased.

LOUISE GRAY *Music For The Home is out now on Leaf*

PHOTO: JIMO TOYIN SALAKO



Shadow of a man: Rob Ellis

Bill Wells

Daydream believer

The discovery and subsequent reinvention of Bill Wells – bass player, pianist, leader of Scotland's finest free jazz orchestra and collaborator with everyone from The Pastels to Lol Coxhill – long ago entered the realm of myth. When his Octet's epochal *Live 93-94* CD began doing the rounds sometime in 1996 it felt as though Wells had materialised from out of nowhere, such was the mysterious aura surrounding his past. In reality, he has been active since the late 70s. Inspired by epiphanic encounters with such mysterious objects of beauty as The Beach Boys' *Surf's Up*, John Barry's "Theme From *Vendetta*" and Miles Davis's *Live-Evil*, he has been secretly working away in Glasgow, crafting a body of work which is only now starting to see the light of day.

"I didn't know anyone who liked this kind of music when I first started," Wells remembers. "In the long run, though, it was probably a good thing. I really had to work things out for myself. I mean, I just could not understand music – the whole idea of keys made no sense to me – but through that I really developed a style that was fairly unique, simply because I wasn't relating to what anyone was doing around me."

This naivety eventually led to him joining a local Shadows-obsessed pub outfit called Contrast in order, he believed, to 'pay his dues'. The working men's clubs of central Scotland proved a baptism of fire. "I actually thought I should learn the ropes so that's why I did the club thing in the late 70s," he laughs. "We were just backing all this crap cabaret, but looking back on it now it was a pretty amazing experience. You were put in situations where you'd have to be a complete virtuoso. You'd get people come on stage and say, 'Right, I'm gonna do "MacArthur Park", but I'm gonna do Donna Summer's disco version'. And you only had guitar, bass and drums! Some of that stuff sounded absolutely amazing – completely by accident, of course."

For lack of any real outlet for his uniquely lopsided musical vision, Wells eventually gravitated towards the notoriously conservative Scottish jazz scene, recruiting some of its players to form the early versions of The Bill Wells Octet. For most of them, even Coltrane's *Giant Steps* had been a bridge too far. Faced with Wells's hybrid constructions, all Mingus-styled brass fantasias and lumbering, monolithic rock rhythms that drew more from Krautrock than bebop, they were appalled.

"The first few times we ran through something it would sound good," Wells recalls. "That was mainly because they were still getting to grips with it. Once they got it right it just didn't sound so good. I didn't want that slick sound. I saw it as pop music played by jazz musicians, and I think they looked down on it because it only had three chords or something." His favoured composing method was yet another factor in scaring off the straights. The bulk of his music comes to him in dreams, which he can recall and precisely notate the following morning. "There was a point where I was having three or four of these a week," he says. "There was a Beach Boys one, where I was in this bus and we were going to a Beach Boys convention, and there were all kind of Californian types with fair hair, and we stopped the bus to pick up some folk, and the whole of the bus just broke into this amazing vocal coda. Just these awesome harmonies. That was a difficult one to transcribe. Then there was the one where I was chasing a cat along a piano. It had these weirdly elongated legs, really cartoony looking. As it ran off, it played this melody on the piano. The next day I presented it to the Octet as "The Elongated Cat Theme", and I drew a picture of the cat and asked them to solo on it. Two of them walked out, on the grounds that I was completely off my head."

Despite fluctuating personnel, Wells managed to compile a CD of live tracks for his own Loathsome Reels label. *Live 93-94* turned him into a cause celebre overnight. Although most of its contributing musicians still completely dismiss it (claiming it was too lo-fi, too loose), it has had a huge impact locally, mostly thanks to the evangelical work of Stephen McRobbie from Scottish group The Pastels, and overseer of Domino's Geographic imprint. Out of the blue, Wells had taken a copy into the Glasgow record store where McRobbie worked. "I first heard Wells at a time when I was first getting into the Impulse reissue series," McRobbie recalls. "I was suddenly discovering how great things like The Charlie Haden Liberation Music Orchestra and *Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus* were. In a way I felt sad that this high-spirited era had passed me by, and I naturally wondered what the legacy of it was. Almost on cue this big awkward guy from Falkirk, of all places, walked up to me and pressed a CD of his music into my hand."

McRobbie eventually asked Wells to record on The Pastels' album *Illumination* (1997). Since then he's been the musician of choice for Glasgow's underground music scene. He's joined Sushil K Dade's tape-splice psychonauts Future Pilot AKA alongside Richard Youngs and The Pastels' Katrina Mitchell, further afield, he has jammed with everyone from Improv bassist Barry Guy to NYC prankster saxophonist Dorgon. "I had been involved in this awful jazz scene for so long," Wells recalls. "It was like taking a step back and suddenly seeing the whole picture. I immediately felt more comfortable. These musicians just seemed to cut straight to the heart of whether something was good or not without bothering about any of the superficial aspects like flashy technique or whatever."

In the wake of the *Future Pilot AKA Versus The Bill Wells Octet* LP on Domino comes the new trio disc, *Incorrect Practice*, on Geographic. Featuring Belle And Sebastian's Stevie Jackson on guitar and harmonica and Octet stalwart Robert Henderson on trumpet, alongside Wells's piano and sampler, its late night atmospherics and subtle dream logic recall his love for John Barry and Ennio Morricone. "A lot of my best ideas I would never have thought of," Wells concludes. "But why limit yourself to things you're capable of thinking of?" **DAVID KEENAN** Incorrect Practice *is out now on Geographic*



Things are looking up: Bill Wells

PHOTO KATRINA MITCHELL

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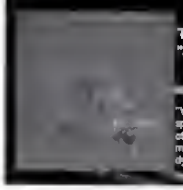
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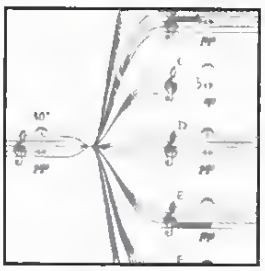
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Beta Bodega Coalition

Rice 'n' beans revolutionaries



The Beta Bodega Coalition is an enigmatic, dispersed network of artists focused on the common cause of raising consciousness about the relations between the global economy and Latin America. Steven Castro, who runs the Beta Bodega label from Miami with his partner La Negra Sharky, defines the Coalition as "a wide group of people who are down for our cause, the people's cause: designers, DJs, hackers, footsoldiers and electronic artists from around the globe."

As Latinos born and raised in the US, Castro explains, "Our perspective is one of being connected to a culture but at the same time looking in from the outside. We speak out against the millions of murders in Latin America caused by imperialism, which has now changed its name to 'corporate globalisation'. Latin America has been prostituted for centuries by its rich ruling class to foreign corporations for its natural resources, labour and land in a manner that will never allow Latin America to develop like other democracies. For us to just sit here and keep silent while we have the power to do something, no matter how minor, is inexcusable."

The Coalition's objectives are grounded in a critique of consumerism. Castro says that its "formation was to send out a protest against those who use their affluence and visibility to promote self-glorification, apathy and shallow trends to consumers via a record label. These labels, even the small ones, have acquired the 'Nike' or 'Gap' syndrome: selling you a shallow image of 'cool' and 'underground' to make you feel good about yourself and fill some empty void created by an ultra-materialistic society. We set out to use the system for our own agenda of promoting awareness in the Third World."

Their agenda first manifested itself in 1996 as a T-shirt line called Rice And Beans. In 1998 they started up a pirate radio station and a monthly event called Beta Bodega in Miami. "The focus of these gatherings was on abstract and experimental electronic music, concepts, graphic design, typography, photography and video with an underlying theme of the Third World struggle,' he declares. Obviously, he admits, "the response was minor, but it was just enough for us to link up with a collective of like minded individuals, designers and musicians alike." In 1999, they set up the Beta Bodega label, Rice And Beans is now the name of a more militant sub-label run by Castro. "It's all in the name," he says. "Rice And Beans is literally Third World power — it's the staple meal in Latin America, morning and evening."

Since then, the Coalition has expanded rhizomatically unconstrained by borders or nationality. "We consider ourselves global-based,' Castro avers. "We are everywhere, with members everywhere, from Ohio to Germany, anywhere that has a computer, phone line and post office."

Mostly, they have released compilation EPs or CDs (such as the recent *Psychological Operations In Guerrilla Warfare*), echoing the decentralised ethos of the Coalition by "allowing us to demonstrate our various members as one united force. This is more conceptually interesting than just another compilation listed as 'Various'." Castro's own role in this is "as a matchmaker, linking all the ideas, designs, concepts and messages of the members like a puzzle". By combining abstract electronica with a political collage on the cover, formal parallels are drawn between the different media and how they construct meaning. For example, the cover of *Psychological Operations* contains a barely legible text which, it turns out, is a visual rendition of the compilation's hidden track: a brilliant spoken word montage about *Psy Ops*, the extreme terrorist training manual produced by the CIA for the Contras.

However, their releases don't necessarily require an explicit message. Hamijama [aka Jake Mandell]'s solo project was a rest from political issues and more of an abstract endeavour," explains Castro. "Which is an important thing to note — we exercise free will and liberty of ideas, so not every release will have a focused social agenda. We do not want to become this predictable 'political' label. Our goal is not to dictate but to create. This is what Beta Bodega Coalition is: trust and justice via artistic expression reaching the youth of today. Babylon's worst nightmare." **BEN BORTHWICK**

Website: www.betabodega.de

bitstream

Changing places. London's South Bank Centre is shipping in **Glenn Max**, formerly Creative Director of Knitting Factory, to fill the position of Producer, Contemporary Culture. Providing his work permit is secured, Max will take over from **David Sefton**, the man responsible for such London diary fixtures as the Meltdown Festival, who has gone West to become Director of Performing Arts at UCLA, California. +++ Classical byte. Digitally formatted music giant **Vitaminic** have relaunched the classical section of their Website. They have signed online distribution deals with the CRI, Vox, Signum, Opera Ra Ra, Olympia, Global Music Network, Biddulph, CALA and Sargasso labels, meaning that recordings of Charles Ives playing his own piano pieces and Harry Partch are now accessible at www.vitaminic.co.uk. +++ Throw away your cardigans. The third incarnation of the **All Tomorrow's Parties** indie fest, scheduled for April 2001, will be curated by new Warp signings Tortoise. Already confirmed are Company Flow, Sun Ra Arkestra, Mike Ladd, Boards Of Canada, The Ex, Femi Kuti, The Sea And Cake, Calexico, Cannibal Ox, Savath & Savalas and (obviously) Tortoise, making this the most eclectic event yet to grace the Camber Sands Holiday Centre. +++ Pushing the right buttons. Miami's free-thinking electro oddball **Push Button Objects** has been working with people as diverse as Del Tha Funkee Homosapien, Tortoise's John McEntire and Doug McCombs, Sally Timms from The Mekons, DMC Championships threepeater DJ Craze, Rob Mazurek, Mr Lif, Cannibal Ox and Aesop Rock for his forthcoming album on Chocolate Industries, *Ghetto Blaster*. Also in the pipeline are remixes by El-P and DJ Spinna, as well as a remix of Anti-Ppo Consortium. +++ Now collect the set. Following the records to the book to the film of the same name, Iara Lee's electronica documentary ***Modulations*** has been released on video by IMC Vision. For more info, go to www.imcvision.com. +++ **Buffy Sainte-Marie**'s rare electronic folk masterpiece *Illumination*s, as featured in *The Wire*'s 100 Records That Should Have Set The World On Fire (issue 175), has finally been reissued on CD by Vanguard. +++ RIP 1. Cottage-Industrial electronics pioneer **Robert Rental** has died from cancer. He was 48. Though he released one of the earliest bedroom electronica singles, "ACC" in the late 70s, his small but precious output pretty much consists of a second single, "Double Heart" (Mute), an album with Thomas Leer, *The Bridge* (on TG's Industrial Records) and the one-sided *Robert Rental And The Normal Live At West Runcorn Pavilion*, he recorded with his friend and colleague Mute's Daniel Miller, when they took the 'Suicide' slot on a Rough Trade package tour with Stiff Little Fingers and Essential Logic. Despite Miller's encouragement, Rental was thereafter unwilling to release records for the sake of it. +++ RIP 2. News just in as we went to press: Jamaican vocalist **Bim Sherman**, who was closely associated with the On-U Sound and Mantra labels, has died following a struggle with lung cancer. He was 45.

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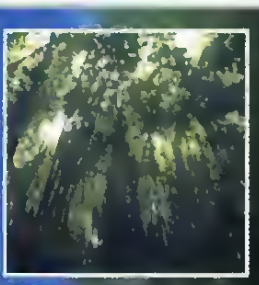
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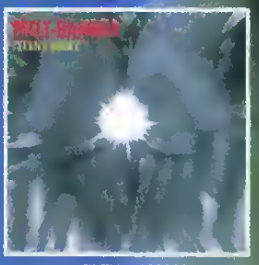
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Dunedin

Let's dispel a myth straight away: 'the Dunedin sound' is a hideous, abject cliche, long unfit as a description of this New Zealand city's local music culture. It was originally coined as a lazy term for the wave of early 80s punk/psychedelia/garage influenced acts, such as The Clean, The Chills, Look Blue Go Purple and Sneaky Feelings, who put an emphasis on feel, expression and simplicity. In tandem with Christchurch's nascent Flying Nun label, a vibrant scene emerged, as did many superb records. Initially mocked by trendmongers in Auckland and Wellington for their lack of sophistication, technical skill and image, the legacy of those groups has reverberated throughout New Zealand for two decades. Along with those inspired by them, these are the groups who have led the way in terms of innovation, creativity and originality ever since.

Three-quarters of the way down New Zealand's South Island, Dunedin is the country's fourth largest city. With a population of 110,000 and home to the University of Otago, it's a classic college town. Dunedin's isolation is regarded as a strength — hype is always dissipated by the time it arrives, while all kinds of creativity are free to occur with few trends interfering. The cost of living is also affordable, allowing the large student population and those working in the arts to survive and prosper.

PHOTO ALAN DOVE

Creative opulence: CM Ensemble at Lines Of Flight



Yet the phrase 'The Dunedin Sound' is still so ingrained that it was recently used as the title for a series of shows featuring Flying Nun old guard acts The Chills and The Clean during the first Otago Festival of the Arts in October. While these groups play exemplary jangly guitar pop, events in the concurrent Fringe festival displayed the true breadth of the event.

The most palpable display of this was Lines Of Flight — two sessions of free noise and improvisational avant rock by (mostly) Dunedin performers. Taking place in the Athenaeum library and theatre at the heart of the city, potent musical innovation abounded. Each performance in the darkened auditorium was stark: no lights, banter or vocals, just jolting sounds and minimalistic films projected as backdrops.

First up were Flies Inside The Sun, who ebbed and flowed, fluctuating between calm and minimal (only cymbal fills and sporadic bass notes) to wild and confrontational (militant tom-tom thuds and insinuating guitar screeches). A unit called Crude followed with harsh, rumbling percussion loops and fierce sax bleats. They concluded by announcing the address of their MP3 Website and encouraging the audience to "Go to it and get a free album" — an effective summary of the anti-commercial aesthetic this event encapsulated.

Sandoz Lab Technicians were literally scorching — an industrial-sized gas heater was placed on stage at the start of their set. The heat might have been excessive, but the trio's approach certainly wasn't. James Kirk (an appropriate name for someone whose group boldly goes where few have gone before) scattered semi-jazz drum flourishes, while Tim Cornelius and Nathan Thompson added intoxicating woodwind drones. Their sound was a dark, continually circulating lull, before each member extracted stuttering soundwaves from their guitars. In contrast, Wellington's Empirical were notably less chaotic, producing a sound closer to a narcoleptic drone. A single guitar texture resonated, matched by a homemade, theremin-like instrument that stood taller than an average person.

The aural treats continued that evening at Sammy's, now a large poolhall, but briefly returning to its former life for The Dunedin Sound series. Here, Plagal Grind played their first gig in ten years, and The Dead C (the outfit led by the godfather of New Zealand outsider noise, and chief of the Corpus Hermeticum label, Bruce Russell) gave a rare live performance. Ten years ago, Plagal Grind were one of Dunedin's best kept secrets, releasing only one EP. Yet their legend has burgeoned, thanks to singer and guitarist Alastair Galbraith's impressive solo output. Galbraith's harrowing vocals evoked tragedy, loss and despair with cataclysmic guitar squalls and direct rhythms adding to the effect.

Ominously, Bruce Russell was wearing a Borbetomagus T-shirt as The Dead C walked on stage. As someone who has seen them live eight times over the years, I can safely say that this was the most brutal and fearsome set I've ever witnessed. The first 45 minutes were a devastating electronic avalanche. Michael Morley whipped up ruptured samples and guitar hums, as Russell extracted a cacophony by manipulating his guitar lead and effects units. Hidden behind his drum kit, Robbie Yeats made synthesizer drones. He eventually struck up a propulsive rhythm, while Morley and Russell gradually generated dense distortion fields from their guitars. The few vocals were buried in the racket. Finally, an hour and a half after they began, the survivors whooped joyfully at the climax of this triumphant appearance.

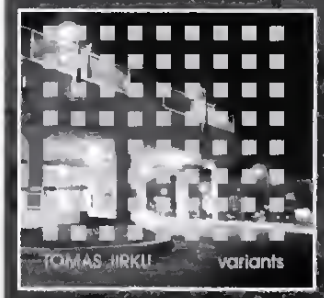
Sunday evening's session began with an intense drone courtesy of four-piece Sleep and the hypnotic violin of Susan Ballard (once of legendary late 80s noise freaks Sferic Experiment). Christchurch's CM Ensemble then strafed the crowd with violent guitar noise and hectic, ramshackle drumming. Wellington's Birchville Cat Motel took the most confrontational and difficult approach of the festival. Using amps, electronics and radios, they created smothering, piercing frequencies that were more abrasive than they were loud.

Fittingly, those longterm practitioners of challenging music, A Handful Of Dust, concluded Lines Of Flight. Here, Russell was joined by Galbraith and Flies/Sleep drummer Peter Stapleton. Playing stand-up drums, Stapleton formed dense rumbles, while Galbraith's violin made wavering, jagged snarls. Russell himself never actually played the guitar, but stood it on its head, gently swaying it, coaxing out walls of feedback.

Overall, the Fringe displayed plenty of diversity, with Ambient, spoken word, Country, World Music, drum 'n' bass, didgeridoo, acoustic, a cappella, string orchestra and electronica gigs. Alastair Galbraith attributes much of the the "creative opulence" of the local scene to the city's "entropic nature" and the ability of performers to operate on a shoestring budget. Peter Stapleton, meanwhile, puts Dunedin's energy down to an unusually high degree of "musical literacy" amongst the local population. "It's easier playing here," he declares. "In Christchurch it's very competitive, with a lot of wannabes chasing success. Down here, they don't even think they'll be successful, so they don't bother about it." **GRANT McDOUGALL**

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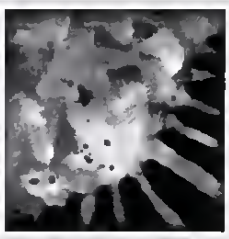
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his imperial majesty

Doug Scharin's masterful polyrhythms provide the pulsing backbone for groups such as Rex, Codeine and Out In Worship, as well as his own outfit **HIM**. Mike Barnes hears why the Chicago drummer's equatorial rhythms sound equally at home on post-rock slowcore and urban slugHop labels. Photos: Simon Leigh

There are many pretenders to the title of HIM. For one, the late Haile Selassie, Ethiopian emperor and spiritual leader of Rastafarianism, insisted on being addressed as His Imperial Majesty. In the midst of an obsession with deep dub, Chicagoan drummer and multi-instrumentalist Doug Scharin chose to name his rolling group project HIM out of deference to Selassie. However, when I meet him in London during his recent visit to the UK, he is preoccupied by the existence of a very different HIM, who are due to play the city the following week. "I'm about to get embattled with the evil HIM from Finland," he informs me. "They're sort of a Death Metal band, but it's a little more glam — they have songs like 'Love Affair 666' and 'Join Me In Death' and all this shit. And they're apparently really big in Germany. Their HIM stands for His *Infernal* Majesty. I'm seriously opposed to it, man, and as far as I can make out, we had the name first."

That may explain what's in this particular name, but it doesn't actually clear up who or what Scharin's HIM is. His version debuted with *Egg* in 1995 on Southern. An excellent and diverse series of HIM releases followed. Yet their press profile has been next to non-existent, despite Scharin having resided amidst the musical ferment of Chicago for three years now. But until this year, the outfit had played less than a handful of gigs, mainly due to Schann's involvement with various groups, including the recently defunct June Of 44. Somewhat anomalously, this loose-limbed drummer had cut his teeth in the ultra-slowcore rock of Codeine and later Rex.

Although nowadays HIM is definitely a group entity, it began as Scharin's solo recording project, worked on during time off from playing in his two existing groups. He explains the genesis of *Egg*: "Rex had bought some real basic recording equipment at the time and I was just fooling around with it. I was trying to learn basic studio techniques and it was the music I was doing to learn them. It was great at the time but I'm glad I'm not working on cassette anymore," he says with amusement. "I had a minimal amount of gear and it taught me to how make the most of it."

The results were impressive, based on an array of exotic percussion tampered with to create a dubbed out sense of space. Soon afterwards, Scharin met Skiz Fernando, owner of New York's Wordsound label, while hanging out at Bill Laswell's Greenpoint studio. (Schann has known Laswell since he was 12, when one of the bassist's early groups rehearsed in his mother's basement.) As a result of this timely encounter, Scharin ended up working on the door at Fernando's parties in a room above Greenpoint. He admits he hadn't heard of Wordsound before then, yet he found some overlap between his own music and the crawling, decelerated beats and Middle Eastern cross-rhythms of Bedouin Sound System and Scarab. Eventually, one of his earliest HIM recordings made it onto the label's first *Crooklyn Dub Consortium Certified Dope* compilation, while the second HIM album, *Interpretive Belief System*, was released on Wordsound in 1997.

Along the way, Scharin formed another group, the curiously named Out In Worship, by teaming up with one Joe Goldring, who had been unhappily playing bass with Swans. They released a couple of albums and toured in the US with a live line-up that included Pere Ubu bass player Tony Maimone. "It was disastrous," Scharin recalls. "We cancelled the tour halfway through. Once we got out there we realised that we didn't get along very well." Just to complicate matters, the first Out In Worship album (which appeared on Sub Rosa, inexplicably credited to Out Of Worship) had been intended as a HIM record, but lacked the requisite low end dynamics. "It wasn't so embedded in the heavy dub," Scharin explains. "I guess I felt I couldn't have any HIM record without the deep, deep bass groove."



The HIM story really starts with last year's superb *Swom Eyes* (Perishable) which featured Chicago luminaries Rob Mazurek on cornet, Bundy Brown on bass and Jeff Parker on guitar. Scharin talks about the low end of dub as the signature of HIM but his own abilities as a soundscaper and "originator" of the material, or so the credits would have it, found him expanding dub's inner space into a kaleidoscope of rhythm, texture and timbre. The 20 minute opening track, "A Verdict Of Science", is HIM in microcosm, the edited material progressing and recapitulating with an extraordinary deftness. It takes in a mass of musical data variously evoking the rushing currents that A Certain Ratio navigated on 'Flight", the rhythmic bliss of Can's *Future Days*, mid-70s Miles and King Tubby.

Scharin responds with a grin. "That's one of my favourites," he says. "We went in the studio for two days. I had some real basic sketches and Rob and Jeff really changed the direction and made the form on a few of those pieces just because they play together so well. The original tracks for that song are really different. Like Bundy's bassline – there was so much rhythm going on already, I had marimba parts which were offsetting it from the drum part, all these different grooves, and he put on all this 9/8 shit. So I had to cut his bassline up – it's all really cut up."

Scharin used some of his original drum tracks, then took samples of his kit and overdubbed them in real time on an electronic Drumkat pad, while even managing to work in a loop of a rhythm by Bernard Purdie. "I had loops running for weeks. I couldn't shut off the power! I just wanted the loops to keep going, so when it was time to bring something back in, it was kind of random, so it just kind of took on its own form. I spent two months in the studio with it. It was two days recording that shit and two months in my room."

"I'm really into finding an interesting point in a track and manipulating it in different ways and finding various combinations of instruments and seeing what can happen," he continues. "I like to physically edit on tape. I don't have a computer. I like the splicing block. I like the sound of tape edits – they're punchy."

His studio technique in piecing these elements together had come a long way from his earlier experiments. It doesn't take a genius to work out that the long shadow cast by the *Bitches Brew*-era electric jazz productions of Teo Macero had severely impacted on his work. But the question had to be asked. "Aesthetically, definitely,' Scharin responds, laughing. 'Up to the point of making that record I'd probably been playing [Miles Davis's] *Dark Magus* every day for a year. And then I got that *Bitches Brew [Complete Sessions]* box. And the liner notes are pretty involved – they give you the time when there are edits. I found that really fascinating. I kept it as my little Bible."

Spending time watching Laswell at work was also instructive. "Bill is drawing from a lot of production techniques those guys were doing at the time. He was always kind enough just to let me hang out at different recording sessions. So I saw Pharoah Sanders do a few tracks in the studio, I saw Tony Williams do a few tracks in the studio, and I sat and watched Bill mix and edit shit together."

But although the music on *Swom Eyes* was, in Scharin's view, potentially playable live, that line-up soon dissipated. "Those guys, they're all so busy we couldn't get everybody in the same place," he says. Now Scharin and Fred Erskine – also formerly of June Of 44 – and saxophonist Carlo Cennamo, who had played with Erskine in The Boom, are finally the nucleus of a semi-stable group line-up. But each of this year's tours almost inevitably found other musicians coming and going.

"It was something I was battling against and I wasn't really willing to accept the line up changes," he says, "but I've come to really embrace it now, I think it's a good thing. It's keeping everything really fresh for us. It's allowing us to form the music to the chemistry of the particular group at the time. It's keeping it musical."

HIM's new album, *Our Point Of Departure*, maps out new ground. Listening to the album is like walking in on a group playing live, walking out again and returning every ten minutes only to find everything has moved on each time, even as it always sounds quite familiar. Seeing how the basic tracks were recorded in a couple of hours, that's not so far from the case. Scharin: "I wanted to do a record that was seamless, all cut together, one piece of music, so we decided to do it all in the same time signature, at 130 bpm. Me and Freddy went in and did all the bass and drums [over the click track]. It took some shape, and then me and Carlo would go off into pairs and write some horn lines. It was single overdubs, pairing up and improvising over it, and then that record is pretty much left as it was played." Even so, Scharin's edits mould the structure and his electronics flesh out the sound.

Scharin says that when engaged in sedentary studio work, he can hear his drum kit 'calling' to him from up the road to come and put sticks to skin. He agrees that many rhythmic styles are in essence fairly similar and can be shifted from one to another by relatively minor changes. The rhythms on *Our Point Of Departure*, for example, derive in part from Ghanaian patterns. His approach to expanding his repertoire is refreshingly pragmatic.

"I was studying them out of a book on traditional African rhythms that were adapted to drum set," he explains. "I thought it was time I got my shit together and figure out what I'd been doing all these years and try to actually learn something. I'm self taught and have never had any lessons, so it was cool. It's like all this independent shit going on. To see it written out was revealing to me, to see how it related to jazz rhythms, a lot of the stuff I'd been into, like Ronald Shannon Jackson's drumming. He does a lot of ostinato shit with his feet and polyrhythms over the top."

Pressed to categorise HIM, Scharin reluctantly describes the music as "fusion", fully aware of the word's ambiguous status following that genre's heyday in the 1970s. HIM's fusion may not be dance music, but live, with two drummers, bass, keyboards, horns and the whole cast swapping instruments on stage, HIM becomes an irresistible avant groove machine. Live sampling and electronics are also thrown in. "We're trying to pull off some of the same studio techniques from the record live, and it's working to varying degrees of success and failure," he says drily.

The group is hitting its creative stride now, writing as a six piece during a summer tour of the US. Scharin is excited by the results. "We recorded a whole 'nother record this summer," he enthuses. "Another hour's worth that we're sitting on. It was really cool to write with another drummer [John Theodore]. The rhythm going off – wow man – I knew there was some cool shit, but it wasn't till we recorded it and listened back I realised that there were some really nice things going on. There's so much information to it, tons of information. I'm really looking forward to mixing it because I think it could change in the studio." Our Point Of Departure *is out now on Perishable (US) and Fat Cat (UK).*



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CHANCE OF THE CENTURY

Christian Wolff

"Chance is used as a way of discovering things," declares Christian Wolff, the American composer whose consistent vision has made extensive use of the random factor to 'shape' his enduring, distinctively sparing works. "Cage once said he looked forward to performances to discover what he'd composed, to be surprised by it," he continues. "I recall somewhere in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* the story of a painter who got stuck while working on a painting. He gave up on it, put the canvas away in some corner of his studio. Some months later coming back to it he noticed a grease spot or smudge had appeared on it, and then he knew just what to do to finish the picture." But today Wolff is anxious to spell out the differences between himself and John Cage, that grandmaster of chance who acted as his teacher and mentor. Wolff's vital contribution, from early in his career right up to the present, has been in involving the performer in what he calls "working actively with contingencies". He respects the autonomy of performers, for him the score is an element in a conversation. "We collaborate, the performer and I," he elucidates, "so this isn't really chance. But mostly there are several performers, and when they listen to each other, this may affect how they each make their choices — so they too collaborate, which again is not a matter of chance." Again unlike Cage, he's been sympathetic to free improvisation, while his later music took on an explicitly political orientation totally foreign to his precursor's anti-aesthetic.

But despite these clear differences of emphasis, Wolff's name inevitably remains linked with Cage and his immediate circle. Wolff was born in 1934 in Nice, France, but brought up in America. Along with fellow composer Earle Brown, he is now the only surviving member of the so-called New York School of the 50s and 60s, of which Cage was the key figure. The other members, Morton Feldman, David Tudor and Cage himself, all died during the last decade. While aged 16, he was a student of Cage for a brief six week period, during which time he provided the catalyst for Cagean indeterminacy. His father Kurt was a publisher in Germany whose authors included Franz Kafka. After the rise of the Nazis, he fled with his family to the USA. Once there, he brought out a translation of the Chinese I Ching (Book Of Changes), a copy of which Wolff presented to Cage. The older composer was captivated by the charts at the back, and chance composition came into being. Wolff maintains that the change was coming, that his mentor would have found some other route, but in Cage's subsequent reminiscences it became a fond moment of inspiration.

Although Wolff is recognised as a member of the New York School, with a composing career spanning more than 40 years, his music has not become terribly well known. But in recent years it has grown in prominence, with an expanding



Christian Wolff in action with William Winant (right) at Other Minds Festival, San Francisco 2000

discography and a couple of major orchestral commissions, notably *John, David* (of which more later). His use of indeterminacy in the late 50s and early 60s was apparently an inspiration for John Zorn's later 'game-strategy' pieces. And elsewhere his music has been taken up by some other unlikely avant garde sources — he assisted in the performance of two of his pieces on 1999's magnificent Sonic Youth release *Goodbye 20th Century*, while earlier this year he appeared at the Other Minds Festival in San Francisco with a group of luminaries from inside and outside New York's downtown peripheries, including Gordon Mumma, Bob Ostertag and percussionist William Winant.

In the event, Wolff's period in New York was brief. He left to study classics at Harvard University, and for many years he has earned his living teaching classics and music at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. If that makes him an 'academic composer', it is in name only — he's no member of any musical establishment. I spoke to him over a very faint Transatlantic phone line, so faint, in fact, that some of the recording turned out inaudible. But he kindly responded to repeated and further questions with a typescript, complete with painstaking handwritten corrections and additions — Wolff clearly isn't an enthusiastic user of new communications technology.

Cage and indeterminacy

It was Wolff's piano teacher Grete Sultan, later a noted performer of Cage's music — she recorded the *Etudes Australes* in the 70s for Wergo — who first steered him towards the then little-known composer at the dawn of the 50s. Wolff has described Cage, who took few individual students back then or at any other time, as "my first and only composition teacher". Since he was only 16, Wolff had little previous musical culture or training to 'unlearn' — unlike his teacher Cage and other members of the New York School. Though it has been derided as mythical, he's happy with the 'New York School' label. "If you want to use the designation it's fine, though I was actually myself in New York only till I left to go to college in 1951. I think what bound us together to a certain extent was our devotion to the music of Webern." For those who don't know the history of the New York School, this connection may seem surprising. Anton Von Webern (1883–1945) was the inspiration of the post-1945 generation of European modernists — Stockhausen, Boulez and other composers associated with the Darmstadt school. The New York composers had no association with that modernist tradition at all, and Cage's ideology — if you can call his anti-aesthetic stance an ideology — couldn't be more different from the Europeans. Wolff, who studied Webern under Cage, has said that he can't shake off the serialist composer's influence. "I still like clean, transparent counterpoint."

Wolff's earliest pieces from 1950–52, such as *Serenade* for flute, clarinet and violin, and *For Piano I*, were completely written out, using very few pitches, he then moved to more complex but still through-composed pieces deploying lots of silence. But like Cage, he became intrigued by the role of chance in music, though he prefers to call it indeterminacy. In 1957, through a collaboration with his near-contemporary, the composer and pianist Frederic Rzewski, indeterminacy made a significant appearance in his output. But Wolff's quite individual use of it is distinct from Cage's. As he explains: "From a practical point of view, Cage was initially interested in using chance as a compositional device. Once he had used it, he had made a composition which was then performed the way it was written, it was fixed. I have very occasionally used chance in this way. But what I became interested in introducing wasn't even chance so much any more, but the element of what we called indeterminacy — not at the point of composition but at the point of performance. So my scores might be made without using any chance procedures at all, but they were made in such a way that when performers used them, unpredictable events would take place."

Wolff prefers to describe the results of this approach as "working actively with contingencies". As with Cage, many of Wolff's scores are graphic, but they call for special skills in their realisation on the part of the performers. Whereas in Cage's music, each player works through the musical events prescribed in the score regardless of what other players are doing, Wolff has focused on the unpredictable possibilities that arise from each performer attending to what the others are doing. He expands on the difference between this "contingency process" and chance procedures. "My composition might consist of time spaces — so many seconds, and fractions of them, within which various kinds of material are indicated. Say, a choice of three pitches from a collection of seven, two dynamic markings and some colour articulation like a pizzicato. The performer then has delimited choices, as well as areas that might be quite free — for instance, the spacing of the sounds within a given time space."

"Mostly there are several performers," he goes on, "so that what they do will partly combine by chance, though when they listen to each other, this may affect how they each make their choices, and so they too collaborate, which again is not a matter of chance." Contrasts between Cage and Wolff are spelled out usefully in Michael Nyman's recently reprinted book from 1974, *Experimental Music*. Nyman points to an interesting paradox in Wolff's music. "In performance the players seem to be in a state of perpetual crisis, yet the music sounds calm, relaxed and unruffled, unlike the avant garde variety which often sounds as though it is actually the expression of crisis."



Exercises in minimalism

Wolff's earliest and strikingly precocious pieces, written when he was 18 and younger, are interesting precursors of American minimalism. I ask him what affinities he feels with Reich, Riley and co. "Well, my earliest music could be called minimalist. That's the pieces using just three or four notes or so. La Monte Young liked those pieces. When Terry Riley and Philip Glass and Steve Reich came along about 15 years later I thought it was wonderful, it cleared the ears out after all that complicated music of the 50s and 60s. It was also a kind of good-time music, strongly pulsed, diatonic, energetic — after the ascetic music that preceded it. I also thought its strength was in its scale — those pieces went on for very long times."

The pieces influenced by minimalism included an important set, simply called *Tilbury*, and dedicated to British pianist John Tilbury, currently one third of AMM. "Pieces like the *Tilbury* set, and the *Exercises* [*1-14*], were a kind of response to the systemic aspect of some minimalism, especially Steve Reich — 'process' music, which takes a delimited, clearly articulated idea and runs it through its permutations." The Tilbury pieces, from 1969-70, are certainly an oblique response. This is austere minimalism, largely pulseless and with lots of space. *Exercises 1-14* from 1973-74, for variable, unspecified instrumentation — the excellent hat ART recording, a good place to start with Wolff's music, features flute, trombone, piano and percussion — also have no obvious affinity with phase-shifting minimalism. "The *Exercises* were about melody," he says, "which I've always thought of as central from the very start. It's what music inescapably does because it has to move through time and so be linear." But the pieces also reaffirmed a central concern. "They were also about how performers respond to each other, work together, the melodic material of the music is given up to freely heterophonic performance." Cage's description — "Like classical music from an unknown country" — is especially apt here. When I suggest that the *Exercises* are more euphonious than the *Tilbury* set, and have a kind of hieratic feel, Wolff demurs. "What do you mean by hieratic?" he erupts. "I don't like the sound of it! Religious, esoteric? No. And euphonious — very slippery notion, and in any case context-bound. What sounds 'good' or sweet — to whom? When? Try listening to, say, the classical music of Japan or Korea or China — euphonious?" Well, maybe they're easier to whistle than the earlier members of the *Tilbury* set. But point taken: these are always going to be tricky claims. Wolff's music is humanistic, with no apparent spiritual motivation — something that marks him out from many contemporary composers. The later *Piano Preludes*, from 1981, have left minimalism well behind, and are almost virtuosic. *Tilbury V*, composed in 1996, is a late addition to the Tilbury set, and the contrast in style is clear — this is more pulsed, dramatic and expressive than his earlier music.

Changing the system

The influence of minimalism was one aspect of a more fundamental shift in Wolff's music. Though the freedom he gave to the performer from the late 50s onwards has been linked with democratic idealism, in the 70s his music became explicitly politically engaged. I suggest that there are really two periods in his music — the first unconsciously political, the second more consciously ideologically mobilised. "I guess so," he responds. "I became, you might say, politicised in the late 60s." But your music was always anti-authoritarian and democratic? "Well, not right from the start. I was trying to find interesting ways of working with indeterminacy, and ways other than Cage's or Earle Brown's or Morton Feldman's." At this point, though, Wolff draws back. "I don't see a clear connection as such between indeterminacy and anti-authoritarianism — or *any* connection. Abstractly, you could say indeterminacy requires some letting go of control. But from a political point of view that's merely passive."

In the late 60s, a number of Wolff's contemporaries were moving from the specialised music of the modernist avant garde to music with a political orientation, supposedly of broader appeal. Most important among these contemporaries were Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski. Rzewski had earlier been a collaborator in creating techniques of indeterminacy, and Wolff was attracted by what he and Cardew were now doing. Wolff had met Cardew in 1961 in Cologne. "We knew of each other's work. It was a time when there wasn't quite so much music being produced, and you knew most of what was going on."

However, Wolff has said that he has a strong anti-rhetorical tendency — "I don't think that music should be manipulative" — and he agrees that this imposes limits on how far he took Cardew's path. "In Cardew's case there's a kind of proselytising streak. For me, the aim is not to say, 'This is what you must think', but to get people to look at things and think about them. Basically people have to do that for themselves." Cage abhorred the idea of music with a political programme, and fell out with Cardew at this time, differences with Wolff were evidently less out in the open.

The contrast between Cardew's approach and Wolff's, it turns out, demonstrates two different ways in which music can be 'political'. I ask him what he now thinks about his earlier claim that "all music is propaganda music". He said in an interview: "We have this notion that there is propaganda music, political music, and then there's the other kind of music which has these humanistic values and is universal and so forth. I think all music is propaganda music. The humanistic so-called universal music is propaganda for that kind of music and for the society which produces it."

"I put it rather harshly," he now says. "'Political' might be a better word than



propaganda' It seems to me that anything to do with culture or art, which by necessity has some public character to it, is political An E flat on the violin is just that it's not political! But the performance of music always has a social setting where it's part of some kind of establishment or power centre a concert for some kind of community, elite or variously interested parties"

Wolff explains how there were a variety of responses to that situation 'Cornelius Cardew became committed to the extent that he put direct political work (organising, polemical writing speaking, and so on) on a par with his musical work He did music for political demonstrations songs That too can be a strong and valuable form of music — remember Hanns Eisler's remarkable mass songs From this viewpoint political music' is a particular genre of music It exists as music and it comes from a particular larger view of the world which one believes in, say a kind of socialism

'Another way is to think of the music as a kind of model, say of co-operation," he continues, "the interaction, both free and contingent, of performers which I described before Or there's the expressive nature of the music that avoids rhetoric rhetoric as an image of the exercise of power, of manipulation" I take it he means that his own music is expressive but not rhetorical "A good political song, sure, will have its rhetoric," Wolff concedes "But even there there's also the possibility of having the music such that in its performance it doesn't simply convey some simple message get rid of all nuclear technology, for instance The point is really more to help people focus certain energies'

Changing The System and *Accompaniments* were two examples of his 'political' works The latter, from 1972, is a piece for piano and voice written for Rzewski, with a text related to the Chinese Cultural Revolution Such explicit political content is something he's since abandoned But since the mid-70s, Wolff has produced a series of instrumental pieces drawing material from political folk music, including *String Quartet Exercises Out Of Songs* (1974-76) and *Exercise 21* (1981) The folk material hasn't always been explicit "More recently over the last ten years or so, I've quoted the tunes less often But generally I've gone both ways Sometimes I've gone quite extremely in the other direction, where if I didn't tell you this tune forms the material for the piece there's no way you'd recognise it" Why does he do this, if the material is unrecognisable? "It's partly practical I use the song material — pitch intervals, rhythmic patterns to make a music that's drawn out of diatonic lines and familiarly pulsed rhythms though trying to use them in new or surprising ways" His earlier music had been more chromatic, more complex rhythmically, and often without a pulse — influenced by 50s and 60s modernism, though he never used serial procedures But that earlier music came to seem antisocial to him "From a combination of various new musical impressions pop music, folk music and minimalism in particular I wanted to work with less esoteric means"

That less esoteric approach connects with a distinctive feature of Wolff's work — his increasing desire to write music that could be performed by amateurs Frederic Rzewski, in an article on Wolff has generalised the point, talking of his music's 'amateur- or beginner-quality, the combination of 'legitimate' instruments with toys or junk its voluntary opening to the noise of the world" Others less favourably disposed have argued that like Cage, his ideas are more interesting than the music, that he produces a "prolegomenon to music" Did Cardew influence him in this growing preference for amateur performers?

"I think we came upon this more or less in parallel I've had good and bad experiences with professional musicians With amateurs I might have different experiences, but rarely bad Because the amateurs are unlikely to come to the music unless they want to They may not have the skills of a professional, but you begin at least with a good attitude Professionals are hired guns in some cases They may have no interest whatsoever in the music, and feel alienated from it For these pieces [the ones for amateurs] it's less important that you have standard virtuoso skills, more important that you stretch your musicality and that's something that a lot of professional musicians are not willing to do'

Orchestral manoeuvrings

John, David is something of a departure, given that Wolff has mostly written for chamber ensembles and solo instrumentalists It's his first large-scale orchestra piece The traditional symphony orchestra set-up is something that he has tended to avoid He refers to 'the orchestra's conventional — hierarchical, quasi-military and often alienated character" Is it entirely due to political objections that he's avoided it? "It's problematic, put it that way On the other hand it's an amazing experience to work with an orchestra The main problem has actually been more practical I'm not inclined to write orchestra pieces unless I've got preferably a commission Obviously there's an enormous amount of work involved Because I don't write much orchestral music, and I'm known mostly for chamber music, that's a kind of vicious circle it's another world I think, to get that kind of commission You have to be part of a kind of musical establishment" And Wolff isn't really part of any musical establishment as his engagements with a whole raft of left of centre musicians in recent years have proved

These forays outside the world of strict composition began in 1967-68, while he was staying in London Cornelius Cardew was playing cello with AMM, and Wolff joined

PHOTO COURTESY CHRISTIAN WOLFF



Christopher Hobbs, Cornelius Cardew and Wolff, London 1968

the group on electric bass and a collection of miscellaneous instruments. He had no background in jazz or free improvisation. "That was my first experience of it. It was sort of quietly exhilarating, learning and experiencing making music without the mediation of scores, explanations, rehearsals, etc. Especially with musicians who've centrally always done that — Keith Rowe, Eddie Prevost, Lou Gare. You're simultaneously entirely on your own and entirely part of a collective activity."

So he obviously doesn't share Cage's scepticism about improvisation. "I think Cage's experience of improvisation came from 40s and 50s jazz, and that was really before the idea of free improvisation was explored." Like Boulez, Cage felt that improvisors would inevitably be repeating themselves, he was also hostile to self-expression. But he became less sceptical about Improv later on. There's some affinity between Wolff's pieces of the late 50s and early 60s and John Zorn's game-strategy pieces. What does he feel about this latter-day improvisor? "I like the energy. He's got a lot of attitude. I guess I like that. But I can't imagine a music that's more distant from mine in terms of feeling."

The Youth of today

One result of his work with AMM was *Edges*, a piece involving free improvised elements. *Burdocks*, from 1970-71, also contained a heavy improvisational component, inspired by the populist/anarchist spirit of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, which Wolff had never actually seen in the flesh. Both these pieces are featured on Sonic Youth's *Goodbye 20th Century*. With its performances of Cage, James Tenney and Wolff himself, the album was perhaps baffling to Sonic Youth's traditional fanbase. But the composer wasn't too surprised at the group's involvement with this repertoire. "Sonic Youth, or some of them anyway, have had a long association with the downtown New York avant garde. My particular connection probably came through the percussionist William Winant, who works both in experimental music and with improvisors. One day Lee Ranaldo called me up and said, 'We're making this album, just want to let you know.' I said I'd be in New York on the date, so he said, 'Why don't you come along?' It was very nice. I've never done anything quite like that. The pieces we chose — *Edges* and part of *Burdocks* — involved a fair amount of improvisation. Quite a cross-section of artists was involved — William Winant, Christian Marclay, Jim O'Rourke and others — so it was a kind of expanded Sonic Youth."

Burdocks is an orchestral piece, its first large-scale, evening length performance in London in 1971, involved almost 40 players, and Wolff thought it was one of the finest performances he's ever received. The name originated with the Burdock Festival in Vermont which Wolff organised — the festival's outdoor venue was covered with thick growths of the weed. A different but equally illustrious group played the piece at the Other Minds Festival (reviewed in *The Wire* 195). "Yes, that was again a mixed group. There was myself and Gordon Mumma, who had played in the first performance of *Burdocks* in 1971, so he'd known the piece a long time. William Winant again was the percussionist, then we had the koto player Miya Masaoka who is an improvisor in her own right, and the former cellist of The Kronos Quartet, Joan Jeanrenaud, plus Bob Ostertag, Fred Frith."

How did these performances differ? "There are ten parts to *Burdocks*," explains Wolff. "You can do any number of them in any combination. For the Sonic Youth version we just took one part — a page of music, which gives you a melody, which you can play in treble and bass clef. And then you also have a couple of rhythmic patterns, which can be expressed in any way you like. And that's it. With those elements, you basically improvise. It'll always be recognisable, and have its identity, because the tune's so prominent. The Sonic Youth performance really was coloured by their sound, gritty and rough-edged, as a kind of basis. Despite his involvement with the electronically-directed Sonic Youth interpretation, Wolff's preference is for acoustic music. A lot of his recent work has been for percussion. "I've just finished a solo percussion piece for Robin Schulkowsky. Before that I did a piece for 12 percussionists." He's working on an orchestral piece for a Czech festival, to which composers such as Alvin Lucier and Gyorgy Kurtag are also contributing. He's also writing music for zither for Georg Glasl, and a piece with theremin, plus violin, horn and double bass for Lydia Kavina. In fact he has problems with electronic music. "I just hear the loudspeaker all the time, as much as I hear what's coming out of it." There's a quality of presence with a live instrument that's missing, he believes. "Before sampling, there was just no way you could synthesize sounds that were that interesting, to me at least. 'Live electronics', computer-interactive... all seem to me potentially interesting. I just have no strong feelings, and practically no direct experience.' The thoughtful, reflective attitude is characteristic. So is the gentle humanism which pervades his music. Wolff doesn't try and hit the audience over the head. His music gradually insinuates itself into the listener's consciousness — hence the time it has taken to come into its own. As he concludes: "The music can remind people of issues, raise consciousness if you like. And then perhaps some of the music's energy will stir up something in somebody. The music expresses and gives energy and focus to feelings and views that are, at least in part, already there." *Thanks to Celia Ballantyne, Simon Keeler, Brian Marley, Robin Rimbaud and John Warnaby for help with this feature*

Some recordings

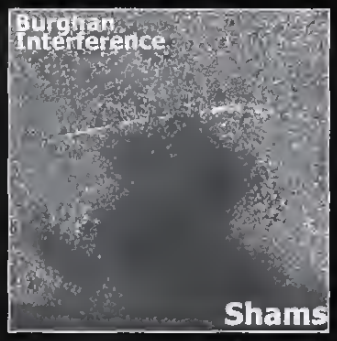
Exercises (hat ART 6167)
For Ruth Crawford (hat ART 6156)
Bread And Roses: Piano Works 1976-83 (Edition Christian Wolff Volume 1, Mode 43)
I Like To Think of Harriet Tubman: Chamber Works (Edition Christian Wolff Volume 2, Mode 69)
Tilbury Pieces; Snowdrop (Edition Christian Wolff Volume 3, Mode 74)
Sonic Youth Goodbye 20th Century (Sonic Youth Records SYR4) includes *Edges, Burdocks*
Various Donaueschingen MusikTage 1998 (Col Legno WWE20050 4CD) includes Wolff's *John, David*

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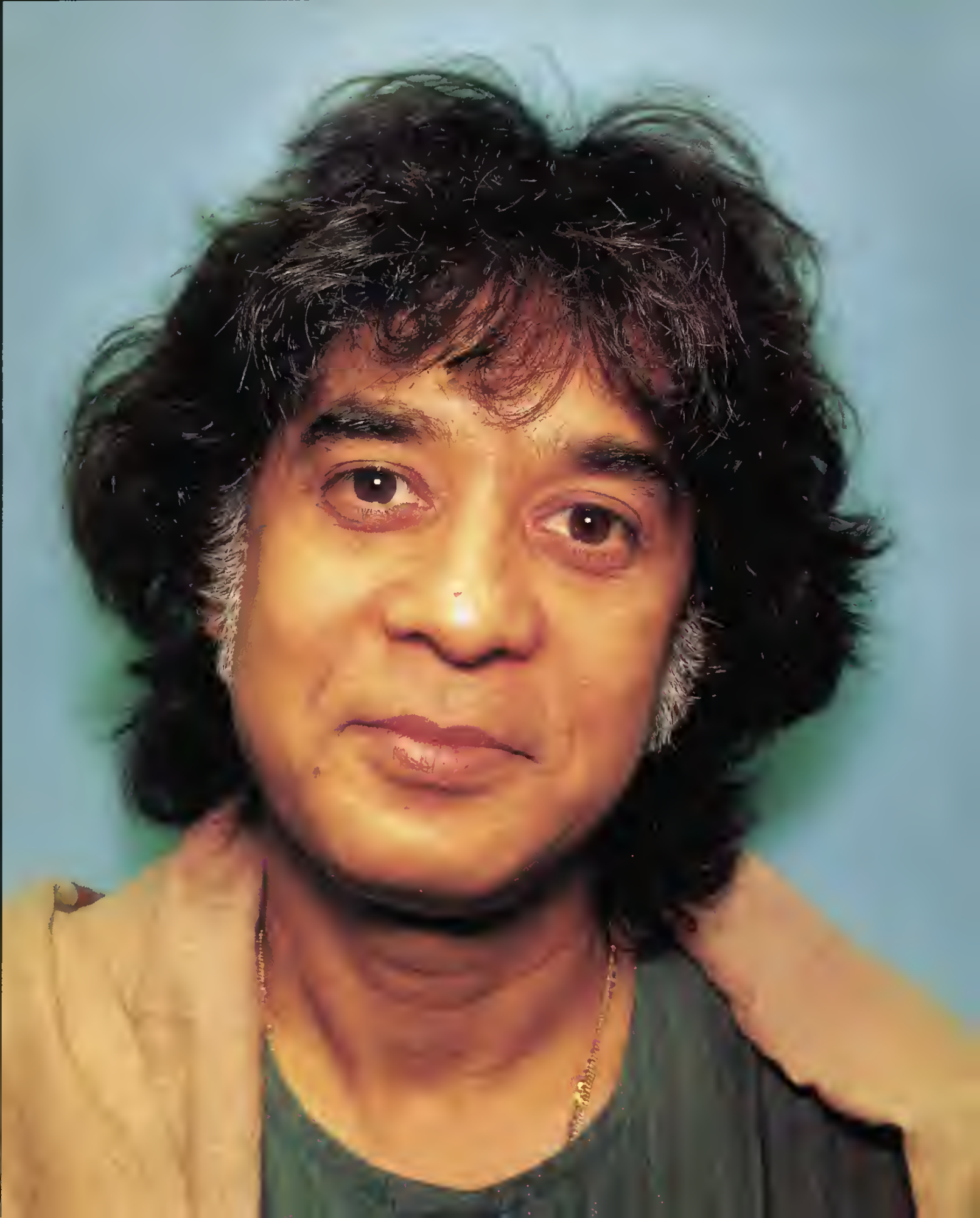
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Zakir Hussain's tablas have spearheaded World Music's journey into jazz, fusion and electronica. In California, the master tabliya talks about his role with John McLaughlin in Shakti, and his recent collaborations with Pharoah Sanders, Bill Laswell and Talvin Singh. Words: Richard Henderson. Photos: Roger Spooner

Ustad Zakir Hussain has just arrived at the northern Californian offices of his label, Moment Records, on a late summer's morning, and already his attentions are being drawn to a scheduling conflict of a sort that does not befall mere mortals. India's pre-eminent contemporary percussionist has been invited to a White House reception held in honour of India's Prime Minister. In 1990, Hussain received the Indo-American Award in recognition of his contribution to relations between the United States and India, between his status as an Indian classical virtuoso and this commendation, the onus is on him to attend. But Hussain is already booked on the day in question to play a concert benefit for the foundation established by film making team Merchant/Ivory. The drummer and the producer/director duo enjoy a longstanding collaboration, Zakir Hussain not only provided original music for Merchant/Ivory films such as 1993's *In Custody* and 1985's *Heat And Dust*, but he also portrayed Julie Christie's love interest on screen in the latter production.

The immediately received impressions are (a) balancing diplomacy with career obligations is all in a day's work for the peripatetic tabla master, and (b) Zakir Hussain has managed to map the timekeeping duties of a drummer onto the rest of his life. Which is good, as the concurrent demands upon his time would level a lesser specimen. Said demands include his polymorphous solo career, as most recently represented by the electro-percussive release *Tabla Beat Science: Tala Matrix* (Axiom/Palm Pictures), produced by Bill Laswell, and co-starring Ustad Sultan Khan, Trilok Gurtu and Talvin Singh. The tabla star must also attend to his ongoing obligations as a first-call accompanist for Indian classical musicians, his duties as proprietor and A&R executive for Moment, his parallel membership in several groups including those fronted, respectively, by jazz guitarist John McLaughlin and The Grateful Dead's drummer Mickey Hart, opportunities for film scoring (and, on occasion, acting), and the continuing work of a master musician who is preserving an ancient tradition even as he continues to innovate within it.

The sound of the tabla — comprising the two hand drums pitched high (dayan) and low (bayan), whose invention is credited to the legendary 13th century musician Amir Khusrau — has been ringing in Zakir Hussain's ears literally since birth. His father was the late Ustad Alla Rakha, generally regarded as the greatest tabla player of the 20th century and the architect of the redefined position of tabliyas — or tabla players

in the modern concert setting. As described by Hussain: "When I was a baby, my father used to hold me in his arms and sing rhythms in my ear. He would sing these rhythms to me and by the time I was three or four, in my subconscious mind, these patterns and the sounds of this language were swirling about. I didn't have to learn the vocabulary of the language or the grammar of the tabla to be able to execute patterns on it. The knowledge was already there. As a child grows up listening to his or her parents' talk, that language is already there in the mind when the time comes to finally speak. The same was true of the tabla for me. The implant was there and my mind had taken it. By the time I was seven, I was playing concerts."

Hussain is a conservator of his instrument's history and its various styles of playing. "There are five major gharanas or schools of tabla, as we say. As with all types of music, they emerge from one part of the country and they kind of branch off. It is presumed that tabla, the shape of the instrument as it was developed and ultimately emerged, was started in Delhi, but that tabla was initially developed in Punjab. The first school for purely tabla style was Delhi, then it migrated to Farukhabad, then to Lucknow and then to Benares. All of these schools are tied in because the repertoire is similar. Each city puts a slight spin on teachings, with respect to melodic interpretation and expression and finger technique." He notes that, like all other forms of Indian music, even tabla drumming was taught orally, with students mimicking the sung instructions of their gurus. Over centuries' worth of teaching, invariably, some information would be lost either by slight omissions while teaching or by the death of a teacher. But Hussain points out, "Because you never wrote it, you never remembered in totality what it was that was taught, so you substituted a little bit here and there. Therefore it mutated into a different style.



"It's true of all masters," he adds. "I feel the same way about my father. When all the students [of Alla Rakha, who died in December 1999] got together in July in India, they all played individually. I was hearing things that I didn't know. I asked one of the students, 'Where is this from?' He said, 'Guruji [your dad] taught it to me.' Basically, there were things that he had taught to them which had suddenly emerged in his memory, [his students] were there and were taught a certain technique. I wasn't there at the time, so I didn't learn this until much later.

"Tabla training is also vocal but in a different way. We learn to sing rhythms. We don't sing *Sa re ga ma* in sargam [the Indian equivalent of solfege syllables], but once we start to play the tabla after having sung the rhythms for a year or two, we do have to learn the vocal repertoire. We have to learn the folk traditions or the classical traditions, the dhrupad traditions. It's simply because we have to have that knowledge when we arrive onstage to play with somebody, so that we can accompany the way we should. In the olden days, you didn't rehearse; you just sat on the stage to play along with the vocalist. If the vocalist started a khyal [a lengthy instrumental piece] or a composition in a particular raga, the tabla player had to know what rhythm cycle it was in. The only way to know that is to have learned it. I myself have learned over 100 different compositions within each of 30 or 40 different ragas, and that's not nearly enough information. Fortunately, nowadays you get to sit with the vocalist or the instrumentalist in the dressing room and figure out at least the beginnings of what you will be doing onstage. That helps."

The synchrony that exists between a soloist in the Indian classical canon and his tabla drummer is, on a good night, a demonstration of preternatural rapport. When asked how two minds and sets of hands can mesh so beautifully during the guided improvisations which are ragas, Hussain simply points out that "you learn the same music, basically. It's like the 12 bar blues. It's standard. Everybody knows it. You could be playing with another musician, but the chord changes are already there and you know them. There are certain characteristics pertaining to a given raga that any musician would know. It's just a question of being able to psychically agree upon which one of those sets of possibilities are we going to work with."

The scion of a great percussive legacy, Hussain is quick to acknowledge his father's importance both in his own development and as a role model for other drummers on the world stage. "[Alla Rakha] was important to Indian music and to percussion players in general, as he was one of the first internationally recognised ethnic percussionists, which brought a sense of pride among a lot of percussionists — African, Chinese, Indonesian — who felt there was no hope for them." The English writer Ken Hunt has often cited the innovations brought to the role of a tabliya on the concert stage by Alla Rakha and his son. As summed up by Zakir Hussain, the time had come to reevaluate the drummers' participation onstage. "The tabla player was a second class citizen in the family tree of Indian music. There are numerous records made in the 40s and early 50s which don't even mention who the tabla player is, even though it might have been a great master playing on that recording. Back then, a tabla player was only that. You have to understand that Indian music as an entertainment art form onstage is only about 60-odd years old. It was confined to the temples and the palaces before that. It never became something that the layman, the everyday common person could regularly attend and listen to, until the principalities were taken away and the maharajahs were gone. Then there were no longer stipends coming to the musicians from their patrons, the maharajahs, so the musician had to look elsewhere for his or her earnings, so it was that their music moved to the stage.

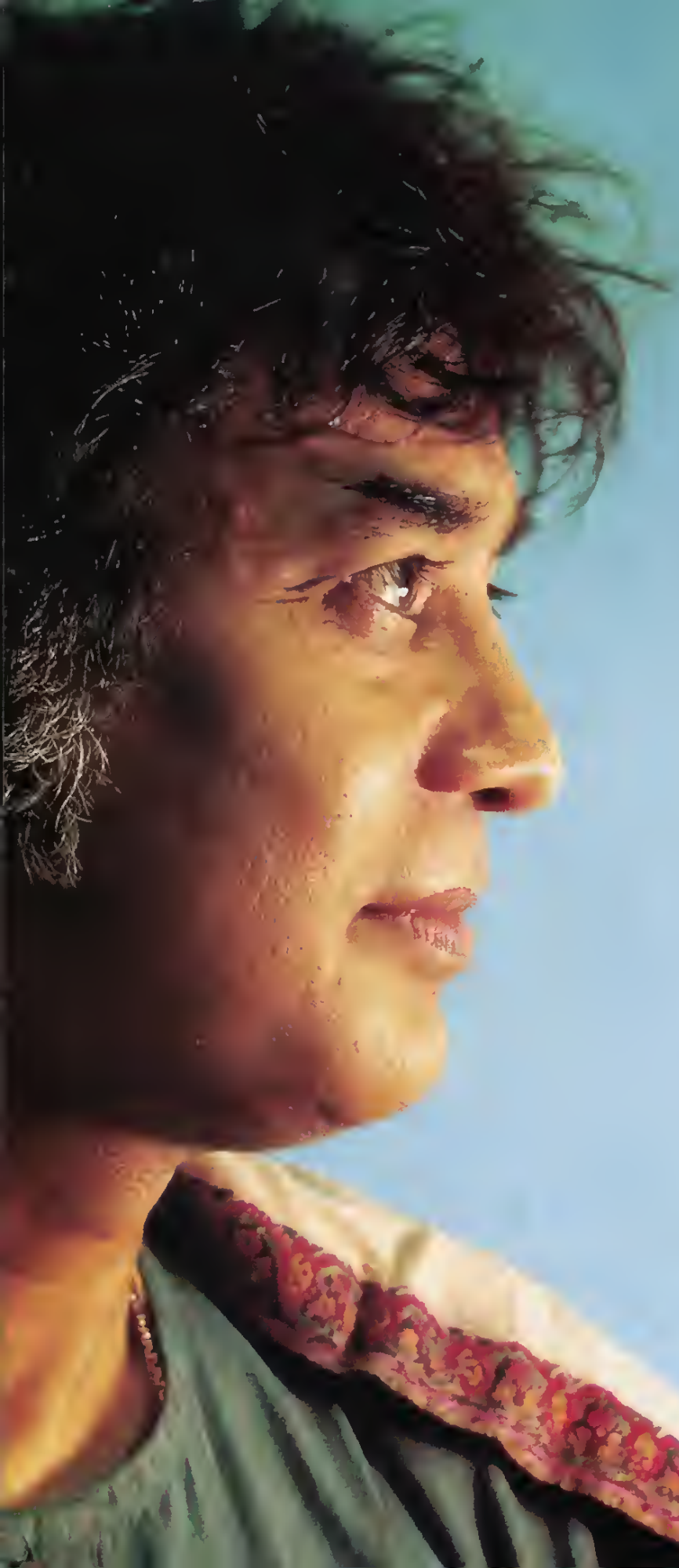
"People like Ravi Shankar, or [sitarist] Vilayat Khan or [sarod maestro] Ali Akbar Khan, when they arrived on the scene, they understood the need to educate and to entertain a new audience. Fortunately, they ran into some very charismatic tabla players who were also young musicians at the peak of their powers, like my father or Kishan Maharaj, these great maestros. Together they developed a performance artform from Indian music, now, a sitarist and a tabla player worked together to create this thing, it wasn't just the sitar performing in front with the tabla in the back just playing time. This was purely done to stimulate interest among the listeners, to let them see how it all comes together. I would credit people like Ravi Shankar with the development of Indian classical music as a performance art. In these last 45 or 50 years, thanks to the work of my father and Ravi Shankar, the importance of the tabla player became clearer and literally more visible. They had never been brought to the front of the stage before. It could never have happened unless an instrumentalist had said, 'Yes, of course, come forward. Let's do this together.'

"My father is credited with this, as he not only made this interactive form popular, but also because of his abilities and charismatic personality, the identity of the tabla player became an important issue. I remember back in the early 60s, when a concert was announced, the main question asked by audience members was 'Who's the tabla player?' If it was a Ravi Shankar concert, it was assumed that Alla Rakha would be playing tabla. 'Well, we have to go see this!' As though it were The Beatles!"

Zakir Hussain's own path to international prominence was a circuitous one, often guided by his father's considered advice. The young tabla prodigy had enjoyed a well received concert career in India, a darling of critics and crowds alike. By his own admission, "I could do no wrong between the ages of 12 and 17. But suddenly, they wanted me to be a mature tabla player of 30 years because they had seen me do the same thing as a young child. I did the same performance. I hadn't branched out or gone into areas where none had gone before. So I was getting criticised: 'Where is he

PHOTO: ROBIN LITTLE/REDFERNS





going? We don't see the next step.'"

Dejected at this professional setback, Hussain was ripe for a change of scenery. In 1970, the 18 year old tabliya toured America for the first time in support of Ravi Shankar. The sitar master recommended Hussain for a teaching position at the University of Washington in Seattle. "So I took the job and it was the best thing that I'd ever done, because I was in touch immediately with so many incredible forms and traditions of music, whose existence I had no idea of previously. The gamelan, Middle Eastern, Arabic music, African music. In India, we were so isolated, we had no idea that other traditions, equally old and refined, existing elsewhere in the world. At the university, I was suddenly hearing Chinese and Japanese classical music, Korean, African, and then I came in contact with jazz and Western classical music. The three years that I was there helped build a healthy respect for other music within me. Then, Ali Akbar Khan offered me a teaching job at his college in San Rafael, California. So, even though I had a tenured position at the University of Washington, I gave that up and came south to the college. Which turned out to be destiny, as this is where I met my wife [Toni, a skilled kathak dancer]."

During the same period, a star drummer from the same vicinity, The Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart, had sought out Alla Rakha in an effort to plumb the mysteries of North Indian percussion. The tabla guru put the American musician in touch with his son, the rest is densely packed history. "So we got together then, in 1974, when we did our first project [*Rolling Thunder*] and have been working on various projects ever since. *Diga Rhythm Band*, *Drumming At The Edge Of Magic*, *Planet Drum*, *Supralingua*, all these albums. But apart from those projects, I was involved with whatever else Mickey did, like the music for *Vietnam A Television History* or Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*. We worked together constantly on projects and we still do. I'm always grateful to Mickey, because through him I came in contact with amazing musicians and situations, like going down the Nile and listening to music, or meeting [Nigerian master drummer Babatunde] Olatunji or Chief Rolling Thunder, or [Jerry] Garcia or [David] Crosby or [Latin percussionist] Giovanni Hidalgo or [talking drum virtuoso] Sikiru Adepoju. What I first discovered musically at the university in Seattle, I could now explore in detail alongside Mickey, because he had access to everything. Everybody gravitated to his barn [the Novato, California studio where Hart worked after his brief departure from The Grateful Dead in the early 70s], and I used to hang out there and learned a lot about working in the studio, about recording technology, what kind of mics to use. We were in the studio constantly. His contribution to my growth was tremendous, not only as a musician with these inputs from all over the world, but also the technical inputs."

A symbiosis has long existed between Hussain and Hart; clearly, each drummer has contributed much to the other's knowledge. Hart described his side of the learning process in his book *Drumming At The Edge Of Magic*: "In India, a drummer, besides being rhythmically accurate, has to fuse with the other musicians to express the dominant emotion being conveyed by the raga they're playing, whether it's happiness, anger, sadness, disgust, love or hate. One of the first things Zakir taught me was this Indian drum palette of emotional expression." Hussain, on the other hand, credits Hart with inculcating swing into his own strict time sensibility, which Hussain describes as typical of Indian drummers. "I was always saying, 'Oh, it's 4/4, it has to be tintal [a 16 beat cycle] or rupaktal [a seven beat cycle] or jhaptal — if you're doing ten beats, that's how it has to be. I was not open to the suggestion that there could be a bar of ten [beats] in a song which was in 4/4. That was a no-no! That kind of looseness or relaxing into or learning to play the beat the way that it would be placed by a clave player, as with Latin or jazz or various other kinds of percussionists, their relationship to the beat is different. That kind of understanding of rhythm and focusing on it is something, a kind of loosening up, that I learned when I hung out with Mickey."

Hart and guitarist John McLaughlin were the artists with whom Zakir Hussain worked simultaneously in the mid-70s. Shakti, the pathbreaking ensemble co-founded with McLaughlin, began in 1974. Of its genesis, Hussain recalls, "I ran into John McLaughlin in a strange manner. I was in New York, doing a workshop in a place called House of Musical Traditions, a little place in Manhattan where musicians from various ethnic traditions used to come and do workshops. I was conducting one of these and John McLaughlin walked in. He wanted to learn more about North Indian vocal music; I explained that, while I wasn't a vocalist, I did know certain things about



Shakti, mid-70s incarnation: John McLaughlin, L Shankar, 'Caroline', Zakir

that music, because I had to learn it in order to properly accompany vocalists. So that's how I ended up giving John McLaughlin a vocal lesson [laughs]! A little later, Mahavishnu Orchestra was playing at [San Francisco's] Winterland, and John got in touch with me and I invited him to visit Ali Akbar Khan with me. John came, bringing an acoustic guitar with him. We played for Ali Akbar Khan at his request, and it felt as though we had always played together. John was so turned on by this that it was he who figured out how he and I should come together with another musician, the violinist L. Shankar. That's how Shakti happened."

At intervals in the years following Shakti's three 70s releases on Columbia (portions of which are anthologised on *The Best Of Shakti*, as released by Hussain's Moment imprint), Zakir Hussain and John McLaughlin have revisited the group's legacy via the shapeshifting ensemble devoted to *Remembering Shakti*. Of its evolving latter day membership, Zakir Hussain insists that this is not Shakti, but rather, "It's musicians playing together who are offering kudos to Shakti, because Shakti was a sort of milestone band. Its musicians got together [in 1974] and pointed the way to what World Music fusion is about today. Two years ago in England, I was asked to put together a performance of one of my records, *Making Music*, which I had recorded [for ECM] with Hariprasad Chaurasia, Jan Garbarek and John McLaughlin. John and Hariprasad, both agreed to play live, but Jan was not available at the time, so the three of us played three English concerts alongside [ghatam drummer] TH Vinayakram, my partner from Shakti. The concerts were recorded, then Verve said that they wanted to release it. John suggested that they should release the live material in its entirety because he knew that I would want it that way, without edits. So it became a two CD set, but a title was still needed. The playing reminded John of Shakti and how we used to play together, the energy was much the same. So the set was titled *Remembering Shakti*." After the album came out, Chaurasia was unable to participate in a subsequent tour and Vinayakram (then turning 60) stated that he wasn't up to the rigours of extended touring, but his son Selvaganesh — whom Hussain had been working with for years — came on the tour in his father's place. Then the South Indian mandolin player U. Srinivas was asked to join in Chaurasia's place. The new configuration met with very positive reception, prompting another series of concert recordings, yielding in turn the latest *Remembering Shakti* album.

Of his recent involvement in the *Tabla Beat Science* album, Hussain cites producer Bill Laswell's conjecture that "Tabla can be Techno. He feels that tabla is one of the most recognised sounds in the world, which I happen to agree with. You look at movies or see a television series, you'll hear a tabla in there somewhere. In rock n' roll or rap, you'll hear tabla sounds in there too. He felt, why not let people know what tabla is all about in this genre, where the DJs or the remix artists are using it, people should know what the real sound of the tabla is. That's how *Tabla Beat Science: Tala Matrix* took seed. I had worked with Bill Laswell on other projects, including the Pharoah Sanders project produced by Bill [1998's *Save Our Children*, which contains Hussain's vocal debut on CD]. So we put together some players who had done [signal] processing work with tabla, I haven't. I've tried to keep tabla as natural and pure sounding as possible, but there are others like Talvin Singh who've done more processed work with tabla. So the plan was to bring them together along with somebody else who is also a tabla player but who made his name as a drummer, like Trilok Gurtu. We wanted to see if we could present tabla in this genre, keep the part which the tabla is playing as pure as possible and yet show people how it works with Techno or Jungle or more processed-sounding studio work."

With a new release in the pipeline from the violinist L. Shankar, Zakir Hussain's role as owner-operator of Moment Records preoccupies him most at present. Moment, founded in 1991, is his attempt to redress what he sees as a deeply flawed paradigm for the recording and packaging of Indian music. His desire to present audiophile quality recordings on Moment, with notes authored by the musicians themselves, is a direct response to his adolescent experience of the recording industry. "I remember recording for HMV in Bombay, that we'd go into the studio, we'd record, then they'd stand us against a backdrop on the wall, take some photographs and then say, 'Thank you very much'. You never knew who would write the liner notes, which photos were chosen, whether the master sounded good or if it was well edited. You had no idea, you [as a musician] were not part of that process," he concludes. "I wanted to change all of that. I wanted the musician to be in control of the product." *Tabla Beat Science: Tala Matrix is out now on Axiom/Palm Pictures.*

PHOTO: ANDREW PUTLER REDFERNS

the primer

A bi-monthly series in which we offer a user's guide to the work of some of our favourite musics. Arguing that the oral tradition of **British folk music** was destroyed by archivists in the act of preserving it, in place of records Ed Baxter traces the tradition's survival in the inflections and idiosyncrasies of great folk and folk rock performers. Illustration: Savage Pencil

Attempting to tap the enormous reserves of Britain's traditional and modern folk music, it's common to find yourself all at sea, tossed this way and that by contradictory currents. From the outset it seems necessary to distinguish somehow between two approaches (there may even be more) to the aural tradition of Britain's past. The difference is between imposing a 'rock' vocabulary and techniques upon a folk narrative on the one hand, and extrapolating from folk such a vocabulary as to bridge the seemingly unpassable gulf between 'the tradition' and the expectations of a contemporary audience. That audience retains neither immediate nor implicit knowledge of the community which may be assumed to exist (even as a fiction), and which is given voice by certain forms of music. Moreover, for that audience, the transactions and relations of said community necessarily appear as purely gestural, as a performance, even as if in pantomime which is to say as an accepted series of rituals, the meaning of which resides as much in routine as in any contemporary relevance its content possesses.

From the outset, the music exists as something only partially understood, whether wondrous or merely baffling. The far-reaching results of this are, first, that the raw material of folk is understood as essentially dead matter, and secondly, that all types of information are permitted, made theoretically available for reinterpretation in the new music. The first consequence seemingly negates the entire purpose of the redemptive enterprise whereby the past is redeemed in the present, the second surely gives way to chaos. In both respects, though, the link between folk (the object of scrutiny), and recording (the method whereby it is preserved and thereby made available for scrutiny) is made evident.

Paradoxically, given its status as something that antecedes recorded music, folk nevertheless becomes characterised by the fact of its preservation — whether by folklorists like Francis Child (1825-96), Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) and Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), who preserve through texts the outlines of a fading oral tradition, by sympathetic composers and collectors like Percy Grainger or Vaughan Williams, by Ewan MacColl and his Radio Ballads, using mass media to broadcast across a nation otherwise localised and site-specific matter. Like Edgar Allen Poe's Monsieur Valdemar, the body of folk music is forever held in a state of suspended animation. This is dead music, kept alive at the very moment of its demise by the recording angel. The tape recorder simultaneously preserves the aural tradition and signifies its obsolescence. For the players of the folk revival, as familiar with dance and pop music as with the songs of travellers or rural farmworkers, music making becomes a balancing act wherein suspension of belief is paramount. On one side, therefore, we have rock music that rehashes 'found' folk forms — resprayed readymades mounted for a new audience — whether good, bad or The Rolling Stones, on the other hand, equally undiscriminating it seems, are those that don't fit in either the folk or rock categories, even as they hold each in their sights. While the first turns to electricity, the second is a result of the application of recording, which is to say, while one is demonstrative and addresses the audience (its recording being merely the vehicle for this address), the other is (or appears to us) introspective, more attuned to the aural self-conscious. Electricity is in fact the great fog bank that has sat on folk for 40 years. While volume and embellishment can offer a way out of the impasse, such cover versions of traditional song that litter any history of folk-rock (for want of a better term) are ultimately merely louder and more detailed than the original — the circulation of which is fitful and largely outside the control of the record industry.

But to my mind, it is more pertinent and pressing to look to models which extrapolate from folk not the form (as something to be refined, honed, made acceptable to an audience wanting the homegrown version of the electric Bob Dylan) but the inflections and idiosyncrasies which are the peculiar characteristics of 'the tradition'. Though the thread of this article, if fully unwound, would surely lead from the pub singer Margaret Barry — an anachronism perhaps even in the immediate post-war era — to archly underground groups like Current 93, or defiantly wacky 'indie' groups like Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, had I more confidence, time or knowledge, I'd argue that this parade of eccentrics in fact occupies some sort of centre ground in the culture, and that the encroaching blandness that has consumed folk (OK, music in its entirety) is the problem. Just as we can recognise the mythical Judgment of Paris rehearsed weekly on the television dating show *Blind Date*, so too can we follow the meandering path of folk and its bastards, from its dissolution in the revival of the 1950s into the present age's roadside posters for *Riverdance* and The Corrs. In each instance we recognise the features of the ur-text by a wilful leap of the imagination. It is precisely this act of the imagination, as it is celebrated in a handful of key recordings, that I want to analyse here. I suspect that most of my comments will be met with something like incomprehension by purists, if any still exist, and bafflement by experts. In mitigation, my selection is determined as much by an attempt to delineate a coherent argument as by what I actually like to listen to, and as it has proved impossible (not to say superfluous) for me to write a thumbnail history of several dozen individuals and groups, each of whom would merit a primer, what follows is to be understood as an idiosyncratic taster. Other musicians (Martin Carthy, Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, The Watersons, June Tabor and dozens more) have been left out altogether for reasons of space. The following is merely one digression among many, contentious and far from definitive, my attempt to understand what I am listening to and why it should cast the spell it does. I take solace in the conviction that most readers will find something here eminently listenable, and something that will converge with their own tastes. For histories of the major figures, there are numerous Websites and publications available from specialist shops (a good place to start is the English Folk Dance And Song Society's Website: www.efdss.org).

Various Artists
The Voice Of The People
(Topic TSCD651670 20xCD)

Margaret Barry
I Sang Through The Fairs
(Rounder 116611774 CD)

Margaret Barry & Michael Gorman
Her Mantle So Green
(Topic TSCD474 CD)

The Voice Of The People is a set of 20 CDs providing an overview of the traditional music of England, Ireland,



Scotland and Wales, edited by musician, researcher and producer Reg Hall. Those wanting to dip into this area of music will find that any one of these volumes provides a way in. Each thematically arranged disc is accompanied by a descriptive booklet, in which Hall emphasises the common wealth of material and the porous nature of the music. He also argues for a new approach to 'the tradition', asserting that "Any attempt to describe, let alone define, traditional music and dance is inevitably loaded with paradoxes and contradictions. There is no popular or even academic consensus about what they include and exclude. Having long existed and cross-bred with popular culture, the boundaries between the tradition and popular culture are blurred, and it can be argued there is value in keeping them blurred." Such a blurring of boundaries is eloquently exemplified on the final track of Volume 8, *A Story I'm Just About To Tell: Local Events And National Issues* (TSCD658). Margaret Barry's performance of "The Bold Fenian Men", recorded at Ewan MacColl's home in 1955.

Born in Cork, Ireland in 1917, Barry was a traveller who ended up in North London singing in pubs. Her recording career comprised a few semi-domestic sessions and a handful of television appearances. Her banjo playing sounds like nothing so much as a barrel organ, the street singer's mechanical accompaniment. Through it, elements of the machine age and the encroaching urban landscape are heard: crude, doubtless, compared to what came after, but it unequivocally states the problematic that folk music in the modern age embodies. Against it she sings in a keening, swooping style, her voice powerful and heavy with passion. She's one of the finest singers of the 20th century, up there with Billie Holiday or Bessie Smith. "The Bold Fenian Men" appears to the casual observer as an old Irish folk number delivered by an authentic voice connected to the distant past. But the song was written by the nationalist lyricist Peadar Kearney only

months before Barry was born, and, with bold disregard for anachronisms, John Ford had the cavalrymen sing it to John Wayne in *Rio Grande*, his elegiac Western of 1950, released a few months before Barry was recorded by Alan Lomax. Any arguments about authenticity or the precise status of the music surely collapse in confusion: the song is always already in a state of transformation. The point is not what it was, but what has been done to it.

An exceptional talent, Margaret Barry is typical of the performers represented on *The Voice Of The People*, insofar as she is unselfconscious in the presence of recording technology. Being recorded is largely incidental to her performance — often the sound of the pub in which they were taped provides its own atmospheric accompaniment. There are two CDs of her work. *I Sang Through The Fairs* comprises solo recordings (including interviews) of Barry by Alan Lomax in 1953 and 1958, and by Peter Kennedy in 1952. *Her Mantle So Green* dates from 1957 and features her partner, the fiddle player Michael Gorman, and other venerable instrumentalists associated with the Camden Town pub scene. Both records are completely fascinating.

Anne Briggs
A Collection
(Topic TSCD504 CD)

Barry's signature song, "She Moved Through The Fair", reappears in the repertoire of Anne Briggs. Briggs was born in Nottinghamshire in 1944 and was active between 1962 and 1973. Whereas Barry's life was evidently hard — she speaks of beatings, bad weather, cyclical hard times — Briggs was from a generation which could choose how to live. Self-confessedly wayward, with a reputation for drunkenness, she was seemingly disinclined to make the career moves her talents opened up for her. Briggs was a wild child, even for the heady days of the early 60s, and her recordings are comparatively few. She headed off around the country when she felt like it, sleeping rough, teaming up with musicians when it seemed like a good idea, doing a few gigs to earn money when so inclined. A self-willed dropout and graduate of Centre 42, the TUC's cultural touring show of the early 60s (MacColl and AL Lloyd were its music programmers), she's hailed as "the first New Age traveller" by Colin Harper in his liner notes to this anthology of her early work. Briggs shares with Margaret Barry a directness and honesty. Mostly she sings unaccompanied. The singular quality that is peculiar to her is to make the material sound fresh and contemporary, to make the recording seem alive. She has presence. With Briggs, the focus shifts from documentation to performance.

The nature of that performance is indicated by "Willie O'Winsbury", a ballad whose text Cecil Sharp prurientlly thought necessary to censor. The lyrics were inadvertently transposed from one song to the tune of another by Andy Irvine for the important Irish group of the time, Sweeney's Men (whose Johnny Moynihan accompanies Briggs on bouzouki). The pattern of error and suppression results in the creation of aesthetic nuances which enrich Briggs's rendition, as she gives voice to a king singing to his daughter's suitor: *"If I was a woman as I am a man, my bedfellow you would have been."* The following line, in which the daughter's name has to be forced into the melody (*"And will you marry my daughter Janet?"*), is a case of necessity being the mother of subtle artistic shifts with far-reaching consequences.

Briggs's immediate influence was widespread. Her song "The Time Has Come" was later recorded by Pentangle, she taught "Reynardine" to Bert Jansch, whose version featured on his 1971 album *Rosemary Lane*, where he mixed English folk and American rural blues in guitar playing adorned with often strange and elaborate embellishments. After seeing her perform, Jimmy Page adapted "Blackwater Side" (a version of a ballad recorded by the Irish traveller Mary Doran, but first published as a broadside in Victorian times) for the first Led Zeppelin LP. It's time she was lured



The first New Age traveller? Ann Briggs

PHOTO BRIAN STIVEL/REDFERNS



Daughters of Albion: Shirley and Dolly Collins

out of retirement Briggs was a recalcitrant whose allegiance to such worthy leftist ventures as Centre 42 was at best partial

The Young Tradition
The Young Tradition/So Cheerfully Round
(Castle Communications ESMCD409 CD)

The Young Tradition, whose self-titled first LP from 1966, and the follow-up from 1967, *So Cheerfully Round* (with the trio moodily dapper in a hayloft on the cover), have been reissued on a single CD by Castle, were a trio of powerful vocalists who managed to combine stridency with a breathless urgency They were formed by Peter Bellamy, Royston Wood and Heather Wood as a more confrontational, abrasive and urgent vehicle for social expression and change Their music has a didactic undertow and often sounds (as do Cornelius Cardew's political songs of the mid-1970s) like religious music, even when delivered with an accentuated nasal twang that conjures up visions of the singers, eyes shut, with one finger in their ear An evangelical fervour informs their performances Equal parts Copper Family and Everly Brothers, at times it's also dirty, naked, vigorous and in-your-face Bellamy, an improvisor given to elaborate, extemporised vocal flights, avowedly wanted the people s music to speak to the people He committed suicide in 1991

Shirley Collins & Davey Graham
Folk Roots, New Routes
(Topic TSCD819 CD)

Shirley Collins was a musicologist as well as a singer Like Cecil Sharp, she visited the United States to collect songs of English origin, accompanying Alan Lomax on his field trips Released in 1964, *Folk Roots, New Routes* was the summation of her knowledge of folksong from both the new and old worlds Entirely devoid of histrionics, elemental, ethereal, on this record her ice maiden's voice seems to occupy an airy space, floating cloudlike, chiming like a distance bell in an otherwise still and silent landscape Davey Graham's guitar playing is limpid throughout There are a few Dylanesque inflections, arabesque flourishes abound At other times, he plays the medieval minstrel through whose technique is refracted residual American industrial elements A tone of forlornly aspirational intensity dominates, which contrasts with the economical musicality and sureness of the perfumeries The record's influence lies not only in the effortless combination of American ("Boll Weevil") and English traditional song ("Nottamun Town", later covered by Fairport Convention), but in its post-expressionistic and entirely modern suggestion of complex combinations of influences, all delivered through Collins s unaffected vocal — mountainstream cool and sweet — and Graham's angular fingerpicking, with its mercurial references to jazz, ragtime and show music Collins stands at the centre of the 60s and 70s folk scene She was accompanied by her sister Dolly and The Young Tradition (on "The Sweet Primroses" from 1967), by Mike Heron and Robin Williamson of The Incredible String Band (on 1968's "The Power Of The True Love Knot") In the mid-70s she worked with her then husband Ashley Hutchings in The Etchingham Steam Band, with The Albion Dance Band and others before retreating from the scene Completing some sort of weird and wobbly circle, in 1991 she was brought out of retirement briefly by David Tibet as his muse for Current 93's Industrial post-apocalyptic take on folk, *Thunder Perfect Mind* Tibet followed through with the connection his Durtro imprint has subsequently issued an excellent compilation of her early recordings, *The Starres Are Marching Sadly Home* (*Durtro 031 CD*), and later some live recordings from the late 70s, *Harking Back* (*Durtro 046 CD*)

PHOTO: KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS

The Incredible String Band
The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter
(Elektra 7559608352 CD)

Wee Tam
(Elektra 755960914 CD)

If Collins and Graham were willing to carry with them what cultural baggage they could recover from two continents and two centuries, The Incredible String Band were prepared to shoulder the entire aesthetic kitchen sink of *"the world and its bigness"* It was a reckless, arrogant strategy, but it worked *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* reached number five in the UK album charts in 1968 and made pop stars of the group Since their inception on the Edinburgh folk scene of the early 1960s, The Incredible String Band had been heading steadily towards psychedelia and their songs were becoming increasingly outlandish as the decade progressed In the course of a couple of albums they moved swiftly from traditional songs, delivered in an earnest folk club manner, to the outer reaches of acoustic hippydom, their optimistic, schizophrenic music presented as a crash course in the transformation of an entire culture But though original in terms of concept and execution, traces remained of their roots Yet again, Anne Briggs's influence is heard here on Robin Williamson's "Waltz Of The New Moon", which shares most of the melody of her "Living By The Water" Further, the wavering vocal that Williamson was to make his own is a feature of Briggs's singing However, his delivery is far more theatrical, gleefully bombastic, even bordering on self-parody If Barry is reciting and Briggs is performing, Williamson sounds as though he is putting on an act. The gusto with which he delivers the song speaks of a larger than life appetite, a bearhug embrace of the material and of the audience The guest appearance of Dolly Collins on harpsichord obscures the pattern of influence, and again suggests that the transformation of shared material is the issue, that originality resides in interpretation — a key motif in discussions of folk and World musics


Incredible String Band

PHOTOS GEMS/REDFERNS

Part bricolage, part borrowing, part theft, such a methodology sidesteps ethical considerations and often speaks of a naivety which unconsciously expresses a lack of regard for the work of others, even as it defines a shared background, a tradition The fate of folk music across the world has been to be dismantled, if not entirely destroyed, ironically often at the hands of enthusiasts and by those eager to preserve it. It's necessary, then, to state that what The Incredible String Band configures is a new kind of music The digressive pattern of reinterpretation which we might imagine warping and refining folk song over the centuries is greatly accelerated, so that individual songs shift rapidly through various (even contradictory) modes, their ends by no means being predicted by their beginnings

It is characteristic of The ISB at their best that their songs move not through repetition or logical progression, but through ruminative reiteration and unexpected developments that one is tempted to link to notions of stream of consciousness Certainly, for all its faux naif charm and amateurish gloss, this is highly sophisticated music, which nods as much to Dylan Thomas and Flann O'Brien as Robbie Burns or Jeannie Robertson The ne plus ultra of this method is exemplified by "Ducks On A Pond" (from 1967's *Wee Tam*), which over a very few minutes drifts from childhood nursery rhyme to Bukka White without any sense of melodic dissonance, while Williamson's outlandish vocal exertions provide the gestural template for singers as diverse as Robert Plant, Mark E Smith and Euros Childs

Formally, Mike Heron's "A Very Cellular Song" (from *Hangman*) is equally radical, though it proposes a method that is perhaps hard to pull off more than once or twice A 13 minute epic, it incorporates wholesale The Pinder Family's "Bid You Goodnight" It was a bold move on Heron's part to have his song swallow another That gamble sets it apart from the others on the album The lyrics seemingly (and ridiculously enough, long after first hearing) concern the love life of an amoeba, with snatches of disparate interior monologues thrown in It's intriguing and very odd The traditional love song, with its kings and maidens and all, is abandoned, or transformed beyond recognition, the link to the past is purely hypothetical and imaginary, a relation that analysis shrinks to the size of an unseen amoeba The new music digests the old, fuelled by its need to consume

Heron and Williamson became pop stars, converted to Scientology, and found that the moment had passed The flipside of fame was that, falling from fashion, the living were swiftly consigned to limbo just as fast as the dead folk singers of yore



Monumentally great: Fairport Convention with Sandy Denny

Fairport Convention
What We Did On Our Holidays
(Island IMCD978428132 CD)

Liege & Lief
(Island ILPS9115 CD)

Fairport Convention's rendition of "She Moved Through The Fair" leads us once more back to Anne Briggs, and further still to Margaret Barry. It's a problematic cover version from 1969's *What We Did On Our Holidays*, an uneven album (their second, and the first of three released during that year, the other two being *Unhalfbricking* and *Liege & Lief*), with its percussive acoustic guitar and crystal clear enunciation, all its rough edges smoothed away in Joe Boyd's production. It is turned into a mystical pop song, complete with pseudo-oriental crashing cymbals and tabla-like swells from the bass — which subsequently provided the unwitting blueprint for numberless anodyne New Age versions. When Reg Hall says about traditional music that "I'd rather it all be dead than sodded about", one sympathises. Here a timeless song is rendered thoroughly out of date — a symptomatic example of one of the problems facing anyone trying to rejuvenate the tradition, or, from another, kinder perspective, the kind of failed experiment necessary for the music to progress. If it seems a blunder, paradoxically it was both repeated and obliterated on Fairport's subsequent *Liege & Lief* in their version of "Reynardine", which features precisely the same arrangement.

Where they triumph this time round is in the contextualisation of the song. On this album the juxtaposition of received and original material, its intertwining and how each refracts the other, is entirely convincing. *Liege & Lief* remains the group's masterpiece. Waiving all categories to extend the reach of hyperbole, this is one of the monumentally great records of the last 40 years. With its oceanic depth and wide-eyed expressivity, Sandy Denny's voice is shadowed in its most plaintive moments by Dave Swarbrick's fluid yet quizzically prickly fiddle, which elsewhere adds dramatic colour to the lyrical, totally assured guitar playing of Simon Nicol and Richard Thompson. A focused and thematically coherent work, the whole record steams along at an excited pace, controlled by the rhythm section of Ashley Hutchings and Dave Mattacks. "Farewell, Farewell", which closes the first side of the LP, is a note for note and inflection for inflection copy of Anne Briggs's "Willie O'Winsbury", though the words are changed and the instrumentation is fleshed out. But throughout, the music is deeply illuminating and compelling. Established classics of the folk revival, like "Reynardine" and "Tam Lin", reappear alongside original works such as Thompson's "Crazy Man Michael", in a seamless and timely suite. *Liege & Lief* exists at the point where arrangement and interpretation occupy the same mental space as creation: the very blueprint of the balancing act suggested by the efforts of those who had gone before and the benchmark of so much of what was to follow.

Thompson and Denny left soon after (the former to work with his wife Linda, the latter to form the short lived folk-rock ensemble Fotheringay), and though flashes of brilliance illuminated the group's subsequent output, nothing matched this genre-defining milestone □

invisible jukebox

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they've never heard to identify and comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of

Otomo Yoshihide

Tested by Mike Barnes



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BOREDOMS

"Bite My Bollocks" from *Onanie Bomb Meets The Sex Pistols* (Earthnoise) 1988

I don't know this one

It's from the first album by The Boredoms.

Oh really? [Laughs] I really love the next one, *Soul Discharge 99*, one of my favourite albums, but I haven't listened to this before It's great stuff

How did you first get to play with the group's vocalist, Yamatsuka Eye?

The first meeting was a John Zorn session in Tokyo, some time at the end of the 80s It was quite an interesting combination he recorded with Yamatsuka Eye, me and a contemporary composer, Yuji Takahashi That was for an audience for the small, tiny press in Japan Some parts were really interesting, some parts completely didn't work That was fun I love that I like this kind of mistake combination together, this kind of risk otherwise improvisation is just going to be safe I love improvisation, but I'm not interested in that sort of typical improvising style

I was so interested in Yamatsuka Eye's singing It has a really strong speed, more speed than any other instrument He asked me to make a new DJ thing together, not like HipHop music, but a new thing During the 90s we did a couple of tours together and made two live recordings I got a lot of things from Yamatsuka Eye He's great, I love his style

You played in a punk group in Japan at the end of the 70s. Do you think The Boredoms' roots stretch back into that scene?

Of course, from the end of the 70s there were really a lot of interesting punk rock bands in Japan I especially love Friction from Tokyo, and a lot of interesting things from Osaka too But, for my feelings, Boredoms is kind of a second generation affer punk rock Because punk is more straight, from the rock history, but The Boredoms has a lot of mixed culture inside

One of my best Boredoms recordings is from a compilation album, whose title is *Ground Burn Out* That is really rare stuff I think, very difficult to find on CD I still love to listen to it That [track] was [credited to] The Boredoms, but I think it was just made by Yamatsuka Eye on a cassette tape recorder in his apartment It is unbelievable, amazing, one of the best recordings of the 20th century [laughs]

TAJ MAHAL TRAVELLERS

"I" From *August 1974* (P-Vine) 1974

Sounds like 70s I love this kind of stuff too

They are Japanese.

Japanese from the 70s? Taj Mahal? Which one? [Sees sleeve] Ahhh, the reissue I'm so interested in Takehisa Kosugi, the leader of Taj Mahal — his ideas are really great. In the 70s I couldn't understand them because they were too difficult, maybe too philosophical Now I'm really interested in them

What were these ideas you mention?

In the 70s I was only interested in aggressive music, noise, free jazz stuff Taj Mahal was too peaceful for me, as a teenager I thought it was too quiet. After the middle of the 90s I started to get interested in this slow, quiet stuff because I am so interested [in the area] between music and silence, and music and noise, it's a kind of fringe of the music Noise music is between noise and music, and this kind of music falls between silence and music. Both are the same thing for me now

In the 70s, Kosugi's idea came from John Cage's ideas, but not exactly the same, joined to kind of Asian hippy ideas His improvisation way is quite different from free jazz stuff A free jazz player always tries to [make you] realise 'this is my music, this is my music', but Kosugi's ideas are really different. He has a kind of distance between the sound and his personality I'm really interested in this point. Great stuff

[Violinist] Takehisa Kosugi was originally from contemporary [composition] He used to worked with John Cage and now he is working with Merce Cunningham's dance company He has also made a lot of electronic music, which is also very interesting

DEREK BAILEY

"Improvisation 23" from *Duo And Trio Improvisation* (DIW) 1978

Sounds like Derek Bailey The saxophone player sounds like a Japanese musician That accent is really Japanese I think Mototeru Takagi?

That's one of them; there are actually two.

Kaoru Abe? But this part is not Kaoru Abe Ah I know this record I have this record [Abe starts playing] This is Kaoru Abe Nice picture, everyone's so young I think this recording is really influenced by the Japanese music scene around this time I was a high school student at this time I was a big fan of Kaoru Abe, especially

I couldn't see Derek Bailey's first Japanese concert because I was not in Tokyo, but I saw Derek Bailey's second concert in 1980 with [drummer] Milford Graves and Min Tanaka, the dancer This trio was really so great.

What drew you towards free jazz as a teenager?

Exactly around this time I was always in the jazz kissa [listening cafe] in Japan and listened to a lot of jazz music, not only to free jazz things In the beginning I couldn't understand free jazz. I thought, 'What's that?' But after one year, slowly, slowly, slowly, then [describes downward arc with hand] finally really quick, going into the extreme music

My feeling, after I listened to Derek Bailey for the first time, was he was too difficult for me because he was not free jazz He tried to escape from any jazz vocabulary, a really great thing, but I couldn't understand it when I was 17 But round about the time of his second concert in 1980, the Japanese version of his book *Improvisation* [was published] I read it again and again I got so many things from this book

I think the free jazz music in Japan of course I like some of the music, but some of them just don't understand what free improvisation is 70 per cent of Japanese free jazz musicians just play in a kind of 'imitation free jazz' style I was completely uninterested in this kind of imitation stuff, so that's why I started to be interested in Derek Bailey and the guitarist Masayuki Takayanagi

Was this about the time that you started playing guitar?

In the 80s I seriously thought about starting to play guitar [It was] difficult for me! I had no technique around that time I did exercises every day, but it really came slowly Finally after 20 years, just yesterday I could play something on guitar onstage [laughs] I'm really looking forward to the next 20 years I love to play guitar, I love the sound It's a kind of partner for me

You were playing some kind of guitar when you toured with Yamatsuka Eye in London in the mid-90s.

In the 80s I thought that I couldn't play the guitar like other musicians, so I changed the tuning completely I put on seven strings, sometimes just four strings, then played it like a guitar But it was a good practice for my guitar work. So now I can play my music on guitar I don't have a technique still but I'm happy to work with a guitar

Do you play guitar in your jazz quintet?

Yeah, also I play guitar solo and often play with Taku Sugimoto, a guitarist from Japan doing really quiet improvisation We just recorded together a trio in London with Keith Rowe which should be released next year



PHILIP JECK

"Demolition" from *Surf* (Touch) 1999

Wow, such a nice sound is that someone playing turntables? Philip Jeck? I just worked with Philip Jeck this summer I really love his style very much, it's really childlike, really sweet.

I think this track is constructed from Sonic Youth records spun on turntables.

Ah, yes I really love Philip Jeck's way because he is always focusing between the music that's on the record and the texture of the record Yeah, great, great. I'm not so interested in DJing Of course I enjoy listening to them, but more to my taste is a Philip Jeck or a Martin Tetreault from Canada, Québec Martin Tetreault doesn't play records but just focuses on the sound of the turntable Of course Christian Marclay is special He is the top

Why did you start using records to make music?

I've almost stopped using records now, but still play turntables, just using the cartridge Yesterday I played a concert in London with just the feedback from the turntables That's more interesting for me Two years ago I was interested in records, but Philip Jeck, Martin Tetreault and Christian Marclay, they already did everything

I think there is some kind of new improvising electronic scene in Japan doing these things, like Sachiko M using the no-sample sampler, Toshimaru Nakamura using the no-input mixer I start the no-record turntable Almost at the same time people have started these kind of things in Japan Also Taku Sugimoto has done almost no-sound improvisation with his guitar and Ami Yoshida is

PHOTO (BOREDOMS): ANNE HILDE NESET



singing without any songs, just noises from the throat [makes clicking noise] It's difficult to realise that this is a voice, it sounds like electric noise

Why do you think there is this desire among these Japanese 'onkyo' musicians to get as close as possible to nothingness by using just the feedback of the machine itself? You pursue a similar path at times with ISO and Filament.

I really don't know the reason, but maybe, in Tokyo there is always too much information, like an information ocean everywhere So we have to survive with too much information and too much information in noises So maybe this is why everyone tries to make a sharp focusing Also Ryoji Ikeda is just using sinewaves and makes very interesting structures Maybe a lot of people don't want to follow this way, they just want to find their way in a small Japanese apartment with headphones Maybe, but I'm Japanese and it's difficult to see Japanese culture from a distance

REHBERG & BAUER

"Heng" from *Ballt.* (Touch)

Sounds like a 90s electronic thing, last two or three years? I like this sound but I don't know this one [Viennese label] Mego?

They are both musicians associated with Mego, but this is on a different label.

Pita [aka Peter Rehberg]? I've never heard this before I really love Pita's *Seven Tons For Free* That was one of my favourite 90s records, it was great. This is also nice stuff — really good When I listened to the Mego people for the first time, I felt like it was punk music from electronics Of course it's not punk music, but they are doing punkish things on digital [equipment] When they came to Japan two years ago I was really excited and also I joined them But a lot of free jazz people were against that, especially free jazz and free music critics They didn't come, they said 'I don't want to listen to computer music,' or something like that.

I was so sad Originally [jazz people] came from experimental things, now they are the most conservative people That's why Mego is a kind of test. A lot of young people come to the concert but people of my age don't come I think a lot of young people got a shock They are not strongly against it, they are just not interested Mego people have done some really great things Almost at the same time [as the Mego concerts], Toshimaru Nakamura starts this kind of music I think they do not so much connect together but there is the same reason behind them

The first time you see someone onstage playing a Powerbook, it is quite disconcerting as it seems to create a distance between the performer and the music.

Yes, that's an interesting point. Now Masami Akita — Merzbow — has started playing a laptop computer He just goes to the stage and presses a button and makes an unbelievably huge noise of music But he just stands up really quietly [adopts serene pose], just like an emperor That kind of contrast and distance I love this I think the people from Mego influenced Masami Akita to use a laptop computer

HARUOMI HOSONO

"Chattanooga Choo-Choo" from *Tropical Dandy* (Crown) 1972

[Percussion starts up] Oh that's different What's that? "Chattanooga Choo-Choo"! That's nice Are they singing in Portuguese? English?

A mixture of the two.

Is it from Japan? Hosono? Is he singing?

Yes, it's from *Tropical Dandy*.

Ahh, the famous one I was not interested in [Hosono's later group] the Yellow Magic Orchestra I'm not against them, I'm just not so interested in their music

We thought this was a good example of how the West is interested in orientalism, and Japanese artists are interested in Western music, and it passes backwards and forwards.

For my feeling, their music is connected with the Japanese economy The 80s was an unbelievable economic season, everything was money, money, money And the music from the Yellow Magic Orchestra and the people around them — this is just my feeling — was really connected to major companies getting bigger together, the promotions, everything really is about money I didn't hate them, I didn't listen to them

Have you been influenced at all by Japanese pop music?

Yes In the 60s, early 70s I really liked Japanese pop stuff, that was before Hosono I still love it very much Last year I made an album called *Otomo Yoshihide Plays The Music Of Takeo Yamashita* He was a composer of 60s and 70s TV music and he made an unbelievable amount Everyone knows his melody without his name And so I remade his music last year — that was really fun I wanted it distributed outside of Japan, but it's only a domestic release

What about your own TV and film music? I assume it's in a different style from your improvised music.

It depends what the director wants, I am just under the director For my brain it is quite separate, when I play experimental music and I compose film music I can make a kind of pop music with films, I can make a kind of classical string quartet music Now the border is unclear, it's melting, which is quite interesting

What kind of instrumentation do you use?

It just depends on the budget and what film I made six pieces of string music, also piano songs, mandolins I play acoustic guitar [and use] vibraphone, percussion and the traditional Japanese gagaku instrument, the sho, joined together to make film music It's one of the oldest Japanese instruments, a wind organ with a lot of bamboo pipes It has a really miracle harmony One of the sho players, Ko Ishikawa, will come here with me for next January's [Japanorama tour of the UK]

BOB JAMES TRIO

"Wolfman" from *Explosions* (ESP-Disk) 1965

I don't know It's a really strange one

The guy doing the tape collage is still experimenting with sound, while the pianist is best known for jazz/fusion.

Can I listen to a bit more? [Otomo sits listening for the entirety of the track, looking puzzled] Chris Parr? No? I don't know You win!

It's The Bob James Trio, featuring American composer Robert Ashley manipulating the tapes and electronics.

[Astonished] Bob James? Bob James is a famous fusion arranger [Looks at CD cover] Barre Phillips on bass? I just met him last week in France Amazing! Wow, such strange stuff That's a special weapon for this interview Great I love a lot of ESP records but I just don't know this one Why did he change to go into the fusion world?

Do you think the tapes and jazz trio work well together?

It's not working, it's really bad mixing, but I love that — I love bad things They should have kept this direction, but they didn't. Maybe if they had kept it, the music world would have been completely different. The next time I meet Barre Phillips I will ask him about this one You should introduce it to *The Wire* readers I thought you had made a fake mix, two different records [laughs]



GENERAL STRIKE

"My Other Body" from *Danger In Poradise* (Piano) 1979

Is this a new one?

No, it's from 1979. You know at least one of the musicians on this.

Really? I like this arrangement. Also I like this mixing very much It's nice

They are all British.

Is this Chris Cutler? [Next track comes on] Ah, maybe Steve Beresford? 49 Americans, something like that. David Toop, maybe?

Yes, that's right. It's General Strike, the group Beresford and Toop belonged to with The Flying Lizards' David Cunningham.

I should buy this Is this released on CD? [Looks at cover] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah Sorry, I have this I use this CD in some of my recordings with Steve Beresford I really love Steve Beresford's *The Bath Of Surprise* Great work, good stuff I think Steve and David are kind of pioneers of home recording, this type of cheap record Up to now no one can do this I like their mix very much

What do you like about Beresford's music?

That's an interesting question, because I was a big fan of serious improvising music at the beginning of the 80s and immediately I bought Steve Beresford's *The Bath Of Surprise* because he was a member of Company After I listened, I was laughing, because it's completely different to Derek Bailey's music There is a lot of structure in it reggae, rock music, pop also He was even singing on this record and at the end of the locked groove, he was still singing

The first time I saw a lot of humour inside, but the second time, it was not only humour but completely serious music for me In the 80s I didn't know this record, but I tried to find his records in Japan and of course they were really difficult to find I found a record by Tristan Honsinger, Steve Beresford, Toshinori Kondo and David Toop, which was also great He was one of the people who opened up my door, otherwise I was just a follower of improvised music And afterwards I was a little more open, more relaxed That for me is reality in life I love listening to pop music, I love listening to film music, I also love listening to noise music, that's my reality So Steve Beresford taught me you can do your music as you like

VARIOUS ARTISTS

"The Swimming Dragon Pays Court To The Phoenix" from *China: The Peking Opera* (Playasound) 1978

[Immediately] Sounds like Pekinese Opera Is it traditional stuff? I don't know this tune Why did you choose this record?

We knew that you had an interest in the modern Revolutionary Pekinese Opera, but wondered if you had been influenced by more traditional Asian classical musics.

I was not so influenced by this kind of traditional Pekinese opera I saw it two or three times It's just too long, sometimes six hours I don't understand the stories, the detail, I couldn't catch the language So I was not fond of the traditional Pekinese opera, but I am very interested in the Revolutionary Pekinese Opera It's kind of rubbish from the Communist parties not rubbish but a really strange creation

Is it significantly different from this traditional style?

Of course it sounds similar for Western people, but for me it's really different because the government tried to change the music This only uses traditional instruments, but in the Revolutionary Pekinese Opera they tried to imitate the Western orchestra with all traditional instruments So they made a huge three string guitar that sounded a little bit like a contrabass, and made a huge Chinese double reed instrument that sounded a little bit like a tenor saxophone, then made a kind of strange orchestration

My search radar always picks up strange things, and the Revolutionary Pekinese Opera was one of these things When I was at university and studied ethnomusicology I tried to listen to the traditional one and tried to love it, but for me it was too long and too old But maybe if I listen to it now I can find a lot of interesting things [in it]

I saw Kim Suk Chul [the Korean opera star sampled on Ground Zero's *Consume Red* CD] in the mid-80s I didn't know his music, but I was interested in Korean traditional music more than Chinese music, because there is a lot of improvisation, and it is more energetic When he took the double reed instrument [hojok] and started to play, the whole air was changed I was so touched He played different instruments, Korean percussion Younger musicians play faster than him, but he played one tone and the atmosphere is completely changed I asked his manager about the sampling If he had said 'No' I would have just given up, but he agreed That was funny he just wanted Japanese yen, because he's a big gambler The manager understood what we were doing, but [Chul] didn't want to understand, he just needed the money for the gambling □

PHOTO CAROLINE FORBES

sound check

In too deep: December's selected albums and 12"s

- ***Across The Cell Wall***
- **Ambitronix**
- ***American Breakbeat***
- ***The Architecture Of The Incidental***
- **Arguelles/kèèK/Chalosse**
- **Big Youth**
- **Philippe Blanchard/Christian Renou**
- **Don Byron**
- **John Cage**
- **John Cage & Kenneth Patchen**
- **Chicks On Speed**
- **Chine Nual**
- **Cinema Recorded Music Library**
- **Coil**
- **Pascal Comelade**
- **Pascal Comelade with Robert Wyatt**
- **Philip Corner**
- **Die Trip Computer Die**
- **Brian Eno**
- **The Fall**
- **Milford Graves**
- **Gwei-Lo**
- **Lou Harrison**
- **PJ Harvey**
- **Kava Kava**
- **Larmousse**
- **Thomas Lehn & Marcus Schmickler**
- **Francisco Lopez**
- **Gary Lucas**
- **Clint Mansell/Kronos Quartet**
- **John Metcalfe**
- **Barbara Morgenstern**
- **Chris Morris**
- **Sainkho Namtchylak**
- **Namtchylak/Hirsch/Bott**
- **Markus Nicolai**
- **Luigi Nono**
- **Bob Ostertag**
- **Evan Parker & Keith Rowe**
- **Pimmon**
- **Pizzicato Five**
- **Andrew Poppy**
- **Stephen Prina**
- **Red**
- **Req/Slater/Arguelles**
- **Jon Rose**
- **Keith Rowe**
- **John Schott**
- **Matthew Shipp Trio**
- **Sweethearts In A Drugstore**
- **Sylvester Boy**
- ***Taster: Sounds From The Funky Underground***
- **Uusitalo**
- **Fartein Valen**
- **Iannis Xenakis**
- **John Zorn**
- **:zoviet*france:**

Plus new compilations, reissues, avant rock, classical, dub, electronica, global, hiphop and jazz releases in brief

Ambitronix
We Da Man!
PLUSH 01 CD

Req/Slater/Argüelles
DeqJam
PLUSH 02 CD

Argüelles/kèèK/Chalosse
Beatbox
PLUSH 03 CD

Steve Arguelles may have staked out his jazz credentials drumming with revered figures such as Steve Lacy, Lee Konitz and Charlie Mariano, but like other robust hybrids cultivated in the Loose Tubes hothouse he flourishes in a range of musical climates. The launch of his own, Paris based label Plush finds him adapting jazz to the controlled humidity of processed sound — real-time interaction and live manipulation, but also the refinements of the remix and studio technique. *We Da Man!* is apparently although not self-evidently a set of concert recordings. The basic Ambitronix duo teams Arguelles's pulsing extended kit with Benoit Delbecq's dreamy keyboard swirls and amiable electronic warbles. They are joined at times by beat designer Req, moving from Skint to Plush, who digs deep and contorts, skewing rhythms towards effects of textured density and grainy space. Also abetting is Ashley Slater, a notoriously loose tube long before Microgroove and his Freak Power antics who here assumes the persona of Dr Bone to administer trombone shots and perform MCing duties.

DeqJam, composed and created in Brighton, foregrounds Req, "the lucid DJ" with Slater and Arguelles conspiring to resuscitate vinyl memories, formative moments sampled and sequenced over slippery, squelching, hazardous beats. Familiar snippets grow strange as they glide, collide, then collapse or dissolve. Jazz noises are stretched, condensed, filtered and phased until they become tantalising fragments or irritating particles. Irritation veers towards something more sinister when, at one point, the Country croon of Jim Reeves surfaces. The rhythm vortex whirls on regardless.

Beatbox locates Arguelles at the heart of a percussive feedback system that runs the spectrum from meaty throbs to skeletal crackles. Assistance in this case comes from keeK, a restrained Finnish interventionist, and Marc Chalosse, an accomplished drum 'n' bass practitioner from Lyon. Towards the end, John Silverman's bowed double bass is woven effectively into the sparse fabric. Overall, the music often sounds desiccated and brittle, yet intense in its insistence. All three releases are lean and purposeful, minimal packaging and an average length of half an hour suits their concentration.

JULIAN COWLEY

Don Byron
A Fine Line: Arias And Lieder
BLUE NOTE 7243526801 CD

Clarinettist Don Byron is treading, as well as blowing, a number of fine lines on his latest album. With pianist Uri Caine as his principal collaborator and a rhythm section comprising bassist Jerome Harris and drummer Paulo Braga, fine instrumental execution is guaranteed. But the choice of material is instantly disarming, not so much by its nature as its range. Compositional credits go to Frederic Chopin, Ornette Coleman, Stevie Wonder, Robert Schumann, Henry Mancini, Roy Orbison, Stephen Sondheim, Leonard Bernstein and Holland-Dozier-Holland. And if Alan Douglas and Bill Laswell's *Operazone* project didn't sate your appetite for Puccini's 'Nessun Dorma", there's a version of that here too.

Byron is in effect continuing to dismantle any neatly defined model listener that reviewers may feel tempted to assign to him. It's as well to remember that a Schumann composition featured on *Tuskegee Experiments*, the album that excited interest in his playing at the start of the 1990s. Shrugging off any obligation to conform to expectations, he exercises his right to roam. Fair enough, but actual listeners equipped to accompany Byron through this garden of forking paths may prove to be thin on the ground. My own response is enthusiastic towards the Byron original here, the elegiac "Basquiat" and the smooth reading of Coleman's "Check Up" and Schumann's wistfully crepuscular "Zwielicht". Elsewhere degrees of resistance arise. I can recognise the suave appeal of Cassandra Wilson's rendition of Sondheim's "The Ladies Who Lunch", but after repeated listenings Bernstein's "Glitter And Be Gay" and Wonder's "Creepin'", both featuring the soprano voice of Patricia O'Callaghan, still leave me cold. Listeners who properly admire Byron's playing will want to hear *A Fine Line* but they should expect to be confronted by the album's calculated eclecticism.

JULIAN COWLEY

Chicks On Speed
Chix-52
CHICKS ON SPEED 002 CD

Sylvester Boy
Monsters Rule This World!
CHICKS ON SPEED 003 CD

The latest side projects from interventionist pop tykes Chicks On Speed have the full on digital come-on of a fetish club fashion show at 2am and are twice as much fun. *Chix-52* is a four track tribute to Georgia's cleancut disco subversives, The B-52s. It features "Give Me Back My Man" transformed into an urgent manifesto to unfulfilled lust, dancefloor biochemical contact ad "Song For A Future Generation', and the sexually overloaded "Strobelight". The insouciant charm of The B-52s' original melodies withstands the stomping and shredding dealt out by producers Gerhard Potuznik and Ramon Bauer, but it's the fragmented delirium of the final track "The Chixmachine" a flickering cut-up of half-spoken commands and technical muttenings, that will undoubtedly have you coming back for more.

A work of mad calculating innocence, Sylvester Boy's debut invokes the excesses of post-punk boys who were too posh to rock. Recalling Sigue Sigue Sputnik, Klaus Nomi, and David Bowie when he was still good, *Monsters Rule This World!* is informed by a grinning Technopop nihilism. Sylvester Boy, the self-proclaimed 'worldwide toy' aka Thomas Sehl, may not actually be the last rock star on Earth but, as with the psychotic stadium anthems of New York's Andrew WK, his music and lyrics suggest he'd be quite comfortable with the prospect. From the fractured verbal aggression of 'Our Sound Is Louder" to the singsong delivery of "I Can Mash You" every track is haunted by memories of the decade that produced Soft Cell, Ronald Reagan as leader of the free world, the home computer and the MX-80 missile. Scared yet? You should be.

KEN HOLLINGS

Chine Nual
Tomorrows Leaders Are Busy Tonight
PLATE LUNCH PL09

Philippe Blanchard/ Christian Renou
Play Lunch
PLATE LUNCH PL13

Chine Nual, aka the excellently named Rick Kitch, has crafted a slinky, modest album of

gentle electronica. The intention is to create an intelligent background music, hovering sounds that don't clog the air with syrup. The opening track pulses delicately like the sophisticated motor of a flying saucer, gradually evolving but not demanding attention. Its title is "Machine Manual" — remove the 'Ma/Ma' and you have the project name. Kitch combines a few simple elements, processed sounds provided by musician friends. A silky, melodic fragment, possibly an Indian flute, shifts and stretches like a sea snake in front of a twinkling backdrop. Curls of digitally digested voice simmer over a pulsing harmony with a touch of Tangerine Dream. The sound is translucent, never particularly dense, and with no pressing emotional agenda. I enjoyed everything except the twitchy detuned zithers of "Mole Bossong". The concluding organ drone, meandering and glowing, has a sentimental tinge like a chapel organist improvising after the Sunday service. The effect is a kind of absentminded redemptive bliss.

Play Lunch is an electronic concept album, the concept being to cook lunch. So Philippe Blanchard goes shopping in a Syrian market, chops up his veg and meat, boils fiercely and uses the resultant recording as musical source material. Blanchard has a way of fading out his pieces frequently, as if to express time passing, that renders them quite filmic. Meanwhile Christian Renou, who usually operates under the alias Brume, employs his kitchen environment as an instrument, and processes the result. Renou points out that he does not use a computer; is this a boast, like tightrope walking without a safety net? The whole album is sadly unengaging, an almost random assemblage of unremarkable sounds that has the dry smell of a university electronic music department about it. Cute concept, indigestible result.

CLIVE BELL

Cinema Recorded Music Library
Your Introductory Record

OOMINO WIG85 CD/LP

The beats community is currently saturated with samples from, and recreations of, soundtrack and library music, especially from the 1970s. The trickle of *Dirty Harry* and *Enter The Dragon* dialogue clips in the early 90s has now become a flood. Whether a wisecrack, an orchestral theme or an album's worth of atmosphere, the same instant contextualisation is at work, producers can borrow the authenticity of an old film and the appeal of a hundred caned evenings watching re-runs at the same time. It's not a surprise, then, when Gregor Reid and Crawford Tait present their work as a library record just waiting to be used in someone's film. They do it very well, with Reid's career in production and Tait's in music software they have the skills and by DJing in Glasgow and London they have a broad knowledge of the sources.

The end results manage, while sticking close to the programme, to suggest slightly out of the ordinary dramas. You get four unreleased tracks from their 'A Million Ways To Die' series — "Russian Roulette", "The Scimitar", you get the idea — and "Getting Away With It", rescued from compilation obscurity. The LP also has the previously unreleased "The Breaks", and the CD has "P Beretta" and 'They Nicknamed Me Evil" from previous singles. The titles give a lot of clues to their world of sound: downtempo Depth Charge-style menace, uptempo cop-hop with nicely-judged Indian percussion, or on the edge synth solos. "P Beretta" is the best version of the theme from *The Persuaders* released in the last year or two, and it's had some competition. This release is intended to get Cinema Recorded Music Library some attention and new friends before the album proper comes out early next year. It will do.

ANDI CHAPPLE

Pascal Comelade
Swing Slang Song

LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER SA54063 CD

Pascal Comelade with Robert Wyatt
September Song

LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER SA54073/EVVA33016 CD

Swing Slang Song has a black and white photograph of Comelade on the cover — leather jacket, cigarette, spiv with sideboards' scowling in front of the chic table lamps — but it's PJ Harvey's breathy, ingenue vocals on "Love Too Soon" you notice first (a track from Comelade's album *L'Argot Du Brut*). Unfortunately, it's hard to hear past her 90s mannerisms to anything individual, while her words try to be universal but end up vapid, pastiche Piaf. The rest of the CD consists of brief instrumentals where Comelade overtracks xylophone, guitar and accordion to recreate the yearning street music familiar from French New Wave soundtracks. At the close, 'sinister' musicbox tinkles imply that we're meant to combine the sounds and cover imagery into an *oeuvre* of filmic dimensions but a movie for your ears it's not.

The title track of *September Song* features Robert Wyatt's falsetto — those hesitant, cracked baby tones designed to deny the macho assertiveness of rock. The song is by Kurt Weill, and Wyatt is totally at home with its ironic heroism (perhaps a little *too* at home). Again, the CD is filled out by overtracked instrumentals, banal melodies ("The Sheik Of Araby", "Knockin' On Heaven's Door") rendered with quaint 'mechanical' noises.

Comelade's soundworld is trite and closed. It cannot express, so it invites us to project our



Staring at the sea: PJ Harvey reviewed page 49

PHOTO: MARIA MOCHNACZ

John Cage & Kenneth Patchen
The City Wears A Slouch Hat
ORGAN OF CORTI 14 CD

John Cage
Atlas Eclipticalis & Winter Music/103
ASPHODEL 2000 4XCD


No slouch: John Cage

Could a work for radio have a more American title than *The City Wears A Slouch Hat*? It embraces such an expansive range of pop poetics, from Iggy Pop, Lou Reed and Patti Smith to Captain Beefheart, Pearls Before Swine and Van Dyke Parks, and wouldn't appear out of place in any of their work. A play for voices by ecstatic US poet Kenneth Patchen, it follows an unidentified Christlike figure, referred to simply as 'The Voice', as he wanders through the urban sprawl at night, encountering a selection of gangsters, misfits and plain Joes along the way. John Cage, writing for an ensemble of amateur percussionists, amplified sounds and gramophone recordings, created a score to accompany Patchen's words, not as special effects but as music. The broadcast, which took place in 1942 under the auspices of the CBS 'Columbia Workshop' in Chicago and presented here in its original form, has a vibrant modernist zest that has not been dulled by the passage of time. It's accompanied on this limited edition release by two early Cage compositions: *Credo In Us*, written for a Merce Cunningham dance piece in 1942, and his 1939 *Imaginary Landscape No 1*, for piano, percussion and continuously fluctuating electronic tones. There are, unfortunately, no performance details beyond the gnomic comment, "Genevieve Blons on shortwave Radio" under the listing for *Credo In Us*, making it impossible to tell when and under what circumstances these recordings took place. This shortcoming, however, is more than compensated for by the sleeve art, which features some elegantly archetypical imagery from Kenneth Patchen's *Panels For The Walls Of Heaven*.

Asphodel's presentation of Cage's first and last works for full orchestra is, by contrast, a much less tranquil affair. Performed with *Winter Music* for solo piano in an electronic version, utilising contact microphones and amplifiers in 1964, *Atlas Eclipticalis* was given the bum rush by both audience and musicians, who refused to play Cage's score and broke some of the equipment: a strange response to a work of such meditative suspension. Cage's free-spirited concerns were always destined to conflict with the Late Romantic hierarchies and the highly charged authoritarianism of the symphony orchestra, traditionally arranged under the musical equivalent of a field marshal's baton. This performance, presented in New York by The SEM Ensemble with musicians from the Kammerensemble Neue Musik Berlin and David Tudor playing *Winter Music* from a score he prepared in 1957, is both thoughtful and disciplined. The fights only start to break out in sleevenotes, when James Pritchett and conductor Petr Kotik attempt to justify the ignoring of Cage's intentions for *103*, which require that the musicians follow the egalitarian lead of a digital clock. Perhaps it is impractical and difficult to present such a vast composition without the benefit of a human conductor. That isn't what Cage wanted, however, and he could be notoriously stubborn over such matters, a fact reflected in the rather hectoring tone that creeps into Pritchett and Kotik's discussion of the composer's wishes. Considering that in 1991, the year *103* was composed, Cage wrote a stern letter rebuking the musicians of the Zurich Opernhaus for not following his score for *Europeras 1 & 2* properly, and offering them the clear choice between either playing his music properly or continuing the ecological destruction of the planet, the case really can't be made strongly enough. Kotik's version of *103* may well convince the listener but clearly wouldn't have impressed Cage.

KEN HOLLINGS

self pity on its polished surface. He flaunts the ironic detachment of his inspirations — Weill, Nino Rota, Morricone — but as pure style rather than statement. Cornelade has certainly made contact with many names in the alternative scene. "Love Too Soon" was used by director Hal Hartley; he's collaborated with Jean-Hervé Peron, now ex-Faust, and Michael Gira, formerly of Swans. Even so, it's hard to see what he's contributing.

BEN WATSON

Philip Corner
Three Pieces For Gamelan Ensemble
ALGA MARGHEN PLANA CNMN 034 CD

American composer Philip Corner belongs to a small core of once neglected New York experimental/minimalist musicians. Only writer and composer Tom Johnson went to the trouble of fully documenting their music. In a series of articles he wrote for *The Village Voice* between 1972–82 (now collected in his book *The Voice Of New Music*). In November 1978 Johnson heard Corner and his gamelan ensemble Son Of Lion perform, on instruments constructed by colleague Barbara Benary, his latest composition of 'documentary music' called *The Barcelona Cathedral*, based on the composer's recent trip to the Catalan city in order to ear research the sound of church bells. That performance is the centrepiece of this latest collection from the Corner archives. Along with the previously released *Metal Meditations* on Alga Marghen, it further illuminates his "many-years experience and experiment with the properties of resonant objects".

His concert presentation of the aural observations of how church bells behave, even down to their mechanical hesitations, sounds not unlike a huge clock with its ancient gears slowly creaking into action. Son Of Lion successfully recreate the succession of peals that resonated in Corner's head, long and loud enough for him to carry it back to New York. The opening *Gamelan* (composed in 1975 and here performed at Wesleyan University, Connecticut in February 1981) is by comparison almost funereal in its approach. Played by members of the ensemble on Javanese Kyai Muntjar gamelan instruments, the usual breakneck percussive clatter of celebration, tradition and ritual associated with gamelan music is temporarily replaced by the measured striking of a single muffled gong. The long resonances separating each stroke shroud the piece in an atmosphere of gloom that is only partially lifted when the other instruments are eventually aroused. Again, the bell motif that dominated *The Barcelona Cathedral* rings through *Gamelan*, but with the innocence of a child winding up a clockwork toy for the first time.

The final piece *Belum* (1991) is more playful. A union of Western and Eastern instrumentation in a loft styled jam session, it occasionally recalls the late John Stevens's improvisational Little Theatre concerts in London in the late 60s. Although these three pieces are unrepentantly contradictory in their range of influences, they urge listeners to replay them again and again, even as they encourage the return to their sources.

EDWIN POUNCEY

Die Trip Computer Die
We Are Your Friends
ALCOHOL ALDT2K CD

20 years ago, Die Trip Computer Die's principals were involved in the mysterious Homosexuals. *We Are Your Friends* is a deliciously weird upgrade of the way that group and its side projects took a hatchet to the fundamentals of pop and arrayed the shards into stick figures. Half of the album is terrifying slo-mo sound collages. "Fourth Flaw" is 12 minutes of somebody bustling around Dr Frankenstein's lab. The rest sounds like the half-decayed husks of songs reanimated by evil spirits. "Nemesis" for instance, starts with spidery electronic oscillations and dub effects that recede behind, and eventually overtake, a sample of jolly holiday strings. It then proceeds through some inverted French horn and a little recitative about *"tinkling land mines"*, flirts with sideways digital errors and a broken loudspeaker, sojourns for a while with a blurry loop that seems to be going backwards and forwards at the same time, and somebody croons a crisp little tune that sounds like it's

going to turn nasty if you stop paying attention It interrupts itself for brief recapitulations of earlier sections or just tosses them into the mix, before retiring with a reiterated, albeit unidentifiable buzz. A little bit of the almost curdled tunefulness of last year's *Stadium Death* shows through the distended good cheer of 'America's Burning", but this time DTCD are mostly engaged in kicking the legs out from under their listeners

DOUGLAS WOLK

Brian Eno

Lightness Music For The Marble Palace

OPAL NO NUMBER CO-R

Lightness is the fourth in a continuing series of low profile limited edition releases of Eno's installation music, available only at the venues in question, or later via Opal mail order It was recorded in 1997 for his installation at the State Russian Museum in St Petersburg, where Eno was living at the time, and as such precedes the other three *I Dormienti* (London Roundhouse 1999) *Kite Stones* (Helsinki Kiasma Museum 1999) and *Music For Civic Recovery Centre* (for Sonic Boom at London's Hayward Gallery this year) They are packaged inside 'tossed off covers of no-nonsense design as 'records of the events', low key catalogues, if you like

Why such modesty? Certainly the music stands up well next to his other Ambient releases Perhaps he feels that without experiencing the sound inside its visual and spatial dimensions they are somehow incomplete and not worthy of more widespread distribution So why not a DVD? Just as Eno embraced the CD as soon as it appeared (*Thursday Afternoon* was a CD-only release as early as 1985), you'd think he would want to explore the possibilities of crystal clear sound *and* vision Of course, there is a great difference between experiencing an installation and watching a two-dimensional interpretation at home Apart from *Mistaken Memories Of Medieval Manhattan* and *Thursday Afternoon* — both conceived as video — Eno has never really warmed to the idea of audiovisual releases After all who really watches art videos — or music videos, come to that?

Happily, these site-specific compositions survive the separation from their original context *Lightness* comprises two long tracks, each hovering around the 30 minute mark, with very little to tell them apart The music doesn't so much evolve as exist in a timeless, imperceptibly changing state, like watching clouds slowly form and dissipate *Music For Airports* had some form of melodic structure, *On Land* had instrumental variety, and even *Neroli* had clusters of notes But *Lightness* is stripped down to sweeps and shimmers, shapes and shadows Repeated listens reveal that there is actually plenty going on, though the overall effect is one of beautiful stasis

DAVID ELLIOTT

The Fall

The Unutterable

EAGLE EOLEAG164 CD

If we only had the over-documented accounts of Mark E Smith's erratic behaviour to go by, then The Fall's continued existence should interest only those with a morbid curiosity in freakshows But their remarkable return to form since the near-genius inspirations of *Levitate* tells another story And if nothing else, the first Fall album of the century confirms beyond doubt that its recent peak wasn't just a pre-millennial glitch Perhaps the old curmudgeon has after all attained a curious state of equilibrium — spouting enough bile to sink a battleship while imbibing enough alcohol to float another But the first three or four tracks of *The Unutterable* leave a sense that things might yet come apart From the debased ballroom blitz beat of "Cyber Insekt" complete with backing vocals from a stray Frank Chicken to the *Trompe Le Monde* style surf-punk charge of "Sons Of Temperance", the vocals at times cut loose from their moorings Particularly in the chorus to "Two Librans" (whose hapless target is Oprah Winfrey), Smith sounds slurringly disengaged from the taut but perfunctory backing But from the drum and bass mantra of "Dr Buck's Letter' onwards, with its tales of checklists, sunglasses and the difficulties of obtaining an AmEx card (and the greater difficulties of having it accepted, once he's got one), they shift into another gear altogether The Fall are on their uppers, deploying an unnerving amount of humour where a mountain of invective would have normally sufficed And as the music gets woozier Smith somehow gets sharper On the double-barrelled rant of "Devolute", his scattergun delivery is as crisp as it has ever been It's as if this relatively new group were already absorbing the worst of his excesses But it all spills over in the ultra-vivid rush of 'Way Round" and the sinister psycho-Techno of "Serum" Phased sequencers swim in and out of the mix with a brain-beating bass end, leaving Smith in the middle sounding unutterably at home Line of the year *"Walking tower of Adidas Crap-ah!"*

STEPHEN ROBINSON

Milford Graves

Stones

TZADIK TZ7062 CD

Philosopher, mystic, herbalist, acupuncturist scientist, drummer — Milford Graves's career has seen him dig deep into all the traditional disciplines of the ancient mystery schools Having been master of ceremonies at most of Albert and Don Ayler's sound seances circa 1967-68 (he even claims to have witnessed Albert blowing a hole through a concrete wall with the stream of his sound), Graves has spent most of the interim years making sense of his experiences. In the process, he has amassed a genuinely esoteric body of knowledge, all of which he brings to bear on




Shallow fried: Coil

Coil
Constant Shallowness Leads To Evil
ESKATON 24 CD

During the third week of September the Coil subscriber newsgroup was in a frenzy. Anxious fans who couldn't get to London's Royal Festival Hall for their third gig of the year (and, for that matter, since 1983) were terrified of missing out on the pink plastic-cased CD that was originally only available on the night. Signed 7"s and rare T-shirts (one hopes unworn!) were being offered in exchange for one of these rarities. However, Coil have decided to distribute the CD through select record shops and various mail order sites, so now no one need miss out.

In performance, Coil made it clear that *Constant Shallowness Leads To Evil* was about death. It was dedicated to a friend "who went there and never came back", another "who went there and came back", and, finally, a third who "recently nearly went there". An amazing video projection of something like a skull in flames was sucked into a spinning vortex firing off occasional aphorisms like *"persistence is all"* and *"resist all that comes easily"*, while banks of strobes compounded the disorientating impact of the roaring loops destabilising the audience's sense of time. This material has formed the backbone of their last two appearances. As performed in a church at Barcelona's Sonar Festival, it was easily the most overwhelming music experience I have ever had. Clearly, the piece also has massive personal resonance for John Balance, who has begun hinting that Coil may never perform live again because it takes too much out of him.

Although the CD is divided into 23 tracks, it also works as a single piece divided into two main sections and an introduction, "Higher Beings Command". Opening with a series of deep gurgling sinewaves and shimmering percussion, it soon gives way to the discordant melody of "I Am The Green Child", which cliplops like a combination of electronic signals and some perverse 18th century gallows ballad. Balance's vocals are so heavily processed that it is hard to make out the lyrics, but snatched lines like *"I am the green child/of vengeance divine"* and *"We're swimming in a sea of Occidental vomit"* signal its concerns. Functioning like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, it is semi-autonomous, even as it explains with macabre relish the torment at the heart of the CD's main narrative. In part, the track sounds like a paranoid hallucination scene from a bad 70s horror movie, seasoned with generous measures of Pink Floyd. Yet it works. Not only is it brilliantly produced, it is also thrown into relief by what follows. Above all, it works because Coil are too serious about their music to disguise their intent as simplistic pastiche or hollow irony.

The second section marks a radical change of direction. Sounding like they've attached contact mics to the equipment of an intensive care unit, the piece generates a realm saturated with competing frequencies and abstract electronics. After 15 minutes, a steady, defibrillator rhythm suddenly lurches into crisis and overload, and the rest of the CD is the narrative of a struggle between these states. The right channel carries an unstable tone seeking the final peace and equilibrium of a flatline, while the left struggles to recover a breathing rhythm. Once he's got it, Balance sings a few verses about loss and death. Simple noise loops constantly modulate for the remaining 15 minutes, focusing on ritual and endurance. Coil's motto "Persistence is all" comes into effect as the barrage of hardcore electronics slowly envelops your mind with its increasingly trancelike rhythms. After it is over, sitting in silence trying to comprehend its gruelling listening experience is blissful. But the relief of having come through it is shortlived. The silence is ruptured by the brief laughter of a jester, at once sincere in his sharing of your relief, yet disdainful in his mockery of it. Laughing with you and at you, above all *Constant Shallowness...* is Coil cautioning you against complacency.

BEN BORTHWICK

his rare studio dates. Playing with his hands, elbows, feet and head, he rarely bothers with merely keeping time. Like all master drummers, he's too busy trying to transcend it.

Free drummers inevitably have the most fun: their exuberant role in the modern jazz orchestra allows all of the torrential energy of the id to come spilling out, while their battery of percussive props lends an element of chaos theatre to their performances. Lately there's been a comparative deluge of all-dancing, all-singing drum records (such as Tom Bruno's *White Boy Blues* and Han Bennink's *Nerve Beats*) but there's still nothing comparable, in terms of temporal sorcery, to a Milford Graves blowout. Following *Grand Unification*, this is his second set for Tzadik. Executed on a specially constructed kit designed to better facilitate mind-boggling rhythmic simultaneity, it looks like one of Harry Partch's huge manmbas, a fantastic visionary environment that responds to Graves's slightest move.

Stones is an obsessively detailed recording, wherein the dying glow of the tiniest cymbal seems to fade for an eternity, yet it is mostly the wet slap of flesh on skin that you hear, as opposed to the crack of sticks, which gives the set its earthy dynamic. As Graves picks up pace, he bursts into garbled bouts of song, snatches of poetry and what sounds like instant mathematical proofs: like he's a conduit for a higher intelligence that we simply haven't evolved enough yet to understand. Some tracks sound like The Master Musicians Of Joujouka (all of them) and others, bizarrely enough, like the dislocated marching codas from Alexander 'Skip' Spence's *Oar*. Most of all, the album is the sound of inanimate matter given voice, continuing the intense, ritualistic dialogue between Graves and his drums that's been going on for half a century.

DAVID KEENAN

Gwei-Lo
Gwei-Lo
BELLA UNION BELLA701 CD

Gwei-Lo's debut, on Robin Guthrie and Simon Raymonde's Bella Union label, explores the contrasts between melody and noise, ambience and dissonance. This instrumental quartet from Cambridge evokes early Eno alongside Slint and Mogwai, blending supple yet austere instrumental rock with various Ambient shades. Gwei-Lo's strengths lie in refusal to quote their sources directly: instead they imply them in the shifting dynamics and sounds of their music, which switch from challenging to soothing in a few bars. Yet such changes are accomplished without sudden, violent shifts, rather, they emerge organically from the interplay of the four musicians. This release is intended as the first in Bella Union's Series Seven, which will showcase various contemporary instrumental artists, including Rothko, Jah Wobble and Guthrie and Raymonde themselves. The concept of a

PHOTO AMY & TANVEER

series of seven CDs, each with seven tracks, strikes me as a little too doctrinaire from the outset. However, these 'rules' don't register as constraints on Gwei-Lo's album, where the quartet more than exceeds their brief.

The one sombre note amid all this promise is the death of Gwei-Lo's guitarist Al Brooker in June this year. His talent shines throughout the album, be it in his furious avalanches of riffs or his stretched-out lyricism.

TOM RIDGE

Lou Harrison
Labrynth
HAT[NOW]ART 105 CD

Lou Harrison
Rhymes With Silver
NEW ALBION NA110 CD

Born in 1917, Lou Harrison is one of America's most senior and respected composers. He is part of a so-called 'maverick tradition', including the likes of Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell, Harry Partch and John Cage, who liberated themselves and American music from the influence of the European classical tradition. Like his friend and collaborator Cage, Harrison was fascinated by numerous non-Western musics (Asian, African and Latin American), assimilating their rhythmic characteristics, in particular, into his own eclectic vision. In the 1930s, the two composers began writing percussion music for dancers and also staged a number of percussion concerts where traditional instruments were supplemented by flowerpots, tin sheets, metal pipes and various resonant 'found objects' extracted from junkyards.

Labrynth gathers together all of Harrison's percussion only compositions, which date from 1938-42. It's worth remembering how unusual these pieces must have sounded to audiences of the time. If their rhythmic configurations now seem a touch stiff and polite, it's only because experimental percussion has since moved in some decidedly strange directions — thanks largely to the non-rhythmic textural explorations of many improvisors. Even so, *Song Of Queztecoatl* with its striking juxtapositions of delicate chimes and silky tinklings, and thunderous timpani and brisk military snares, retains an engaging dramatic potency. *Fifth Simfony* is another highlight, its second movement conjuring a ceremonial mood with spatial, pointillistic gestures. But the exotic, pots 'n' pans gamelan of *Double Music*, co-composed with Cage, most effectively captures the excitement of their junkyard aesthetic. And like Edgard Varese's earlier percussive masterwork, *Ionisation*, it's much too short.

Commissioned by the Mark Morris Dance Group and premiered in 1997, *Rhymes With Silver* showcases Harrison's continuing interest in dance composition. *Prelude* for solo cello was originally performed by Yo-Yo Ma but here former Kronos Quartet member Joan Jeanrenaud ably conveys its post-Romantic wistfulness. Featuring combinations of cello, violin, viola, piano and percussion, the other 11 movements possess a similar expressive directness and in most cases are unashamedly lyrical. Depending on your appetite for dissonance and complexity, you'll either find these pieces refreshingly charming and straightforward, or unbearably banal and saccharine. But not even so respected a senior composer as Harrison can get away with the dreadfully twee *Romantic Waltz*.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

PJ Harvey
Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea
UNIVERSAL/ISLAND CID8099548145 CD

If the most important aspect of PJ Harvey's sixth studio album has to be Polly Jean's taut refocusing of her group's sonic energy, *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea* gives away a solitary clue that it really represents her different take on the world. It's not the sleeve's selection of relaxed group photos, despite its positive comparison with 1998's *Is This Desire?* (featuring a dead bird washed up on a beach) and *To Bring You My Love*, which offered a disquieting image of seduction and need. Here, a single, tiny still of a Mills & Boon pulp romance propped up on the studio mixing desk carries an explicit irony in its juxtaposition of cheap passion and control panel. Let nobody say Harvey doesn't know what she's doing.

Given her capacity to align reinvention with a developing maturity, the 13 lucky songs of *Stories* deliver a complex text. It is certainly less frenetic, as if Harvey is finding new ways to exert her presence. In addition, its thoughtful spaces and pauses suggest room for doubt and manoeuvre. Indeed, the sentiment of "We Float" (*"Take life as it comes"*) underscored by the dreamy keyboard and E-bow arrangement of PJ's longterm collaborators and co-producers Rob Ellis and Mick Harvey, would have been unthinkable before. Much attention has been directed at "This Mess We're In", Harvey's duet with Radiohead's Thom Yorke, and rightly so, for its fractured sense of spent love and dislocation and its conflation of images — helicopters, skyscrapers and freeways — and emotion. Patti Smith's spirit still hovers... at times, Harvey slows her delivery to a drawly Sprechtstimme — as does Nick Cave's. You can't help wondering if the *"syphilis and greed"* invoked on a tightlipped, resolutely sexy "The Whores Hustle And The Hustlers Whore", is, perhaps, a nod to the Black Sun-King's "Mercy" (from *Tender Prey*).

If songs like "Kamikaze" or "This Is Love" have a pulse and momentum that recalls Harvey's earliest albums, *Stories* mostly derives its greatest strength from an authority of its own making. It's the best way forward.

LOUISE GRAY

Kava Kava
Funked Up And Freaked Out EP
CHOCOLATE FIREGUARD ARTISTES CFA002 CD

Various Artists
Taster>>Sounds From The Funky Underground
CHOCOLATE FIREGUARD ARTISTES CFA001 CD

Over the past five years, Huddersfield's Kava Kava have made themselves central to a scene that wants to move your feet, but isn't content with the pared-down Sachlichkeit of Techno. Rare Groove resolves to kick ass. Onstage, Kava frontman Pat Fulgoni is larger than life. Almost too monumentally avid for an industry fixated on patronisable non-entities, his singing has a confrontational musicality British pop hasn't seen since Jack Bruce (he's a trumpeter, which may explain why his vocals hit so strong). Kava Kava weave Black Rock guitars, Stax horns and live percussion through grinding electro beats, while Fulgoni's lyrics are peppered with eccentric, DIY Dada images. The five track *Funked Up And Freaked Out* EP joins *You Can Live Here* (1995) and *Supalube* (1997) as sterling examples of what driven, climactic songwriting can make of current beats and modes: a Glastonbury act to unite hippies, punks, crusties and clubbers into one pulsating mass of anti-capitalist craziness. Kava Kava are funky and fluid, much less laboured than many attempts to do the same (they're also big in the Czech Republic).

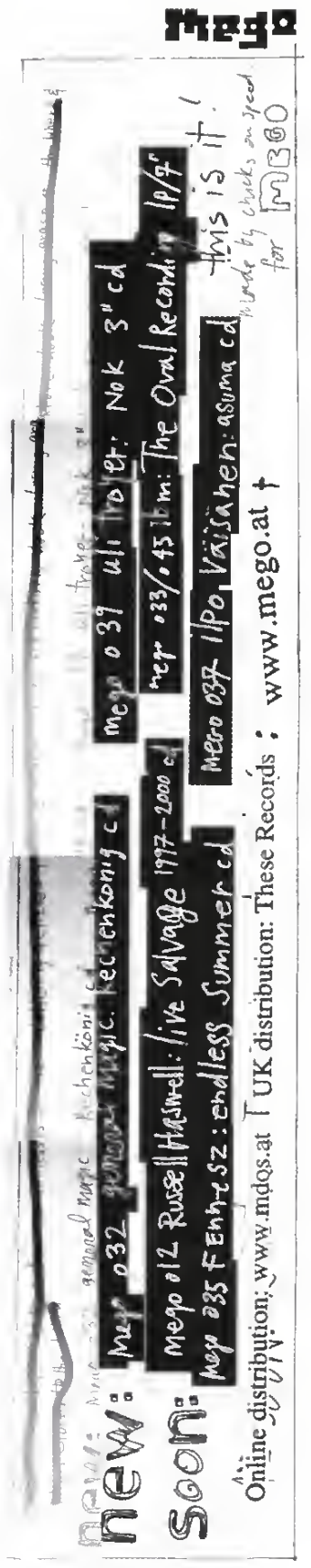
Taster>>Sounds From The Underground presents 17 groups from this scene, a manifesto from working dance units who've twigged the sarcastic 'launch the rocket' melodrama required for onstage funk. 15 tracks are live, though all have the hot, busy vibe which chart-oriented pop tends to tidy up. Blaxploitation soundtracks are a big influence, not just the chicka-chicka guitars of *Shaft*, but also the sonic riches of JJ Johnson, Curtis Mayfield, Booker T and Coleridge Taylor-Perkinson. Huggy's deployment of garish splendours filched from Henry Mancini and John Barry is hilarious. Gil Scott-Heron, Specials, Happy Mondays and Blaggers ITA provide other collective reference points.

In this zone, the dance imperative feels liberating rather than restrictive. Acetate's "Platinum" has that spirit of 'top that!' invention which convulsed bigband jazz in the late 1920s. Gangsta beats, dub bass chasms, drum 'n' bass automatomania, Afro flutes and kwela quotes show these groups have done their homework, and now want to knock you sideways with their discoveries.

BEN WATSON

Larmousse
Larmousse
CITY SLANG 201622 CD

Cliff Henderson and Scott Wallace are both in their twenties and from Glasgow. As Larmousse they have achieved a working synthesis of rock sound sources and long slow





Spring was harsh: Keith Rowe

PHOTO ZV VASOVIC

Keith Rowe
Harsh, Guitar Solo
GROB GROB209 CD

Evan Parker/Keith Rowe
Dark Rags
POTLATCH P200 CD

"After several years of bizarre playing in a sort of anti-jazz style that always ill-suited his supposed role of rhythm guitarist, Rowe now seems on the point of demonstrating that his individual approach to jazz guitar is fully vindicated." That was in 1965, the opinion of a *Jazz Monthly* critic despatched to cover the Plymouth sound of Mike Westbrook's Jazz Band.

A full vindication leaves little room for manoeuvre, yet here is Mr Rowe, 35 years later, erasing that vindication with a style so anti-jazz that it makes one marvel that The Mike Westbrook Jazz Band could ever contain it. My first exposure to Rowe's horizontal, guitar-shaped, amplified string, wood resonator and short wave radio improvisations came two years after *Jazz Monthly* with a string of AMM concerts and sessions held in London venues as diverse as the Roundhouse, The Place, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Ronnie Scott's.

In *The Sunday Times* of 13 June 1971, Felix Aprahamian's summary of the QEH performance was an amusingly pithy one-liner: "Most of it consisted of endless microtonal inflections and percussive accretions to a held organ chord — B flat major, second inversion — a chord with which, as Sir Jack Westrup recently declared in similar circumstances, I am not unfamiliar."

Listening to *Harsh*. . ., I am happy to report that little has changed. No organ, and the tonal centre couldn't be pinned down to a B flat major of whatever inversion, but the methodology — microtonal inflections and percussive accretions — remains consistent. It's a sound with which I, too, am not unfamiliar. Perhaps we should consider this apparent stasis in the light of what improvisation means, or the political movements with which improvised music has been associated through its now lengthening history.

In his brief sleevenotes, Rowe suggests some points of consideration: the technical means of producing his sounds have been in use for more than 35 years; the music resists the consumerism that infects our culture, the circumstances of recording were bleakly opposite to the comfortable conditions of AMM's one recording for ECM; the harsh surface of the playing is a statement about the harshness of global poverty, political repression and cultural deprivation.

His cartoon drawings for the CD cover, somewhat in the style of early Patrick Caulfield, are abstractions of guitar strings under assault from saw blades, crocodile clips, mini-fans and springs. Familiar devices, as are the Cagean murmurings of shortwave voices and North African musics that cavort at the periphery of audition, yet Rowe brings a new sensibility to old methods. For Rowe, usually a player who soaks himself with preternatural skill into the environmental grain, the sound is *Harsh*, as advertised on the tin: out-of-register, brutal, calculatedly (perhaps only in retrospect) repellent and dominant. None of those seemingly negative descriptions deny the compelling force of this performance. A factor that may be significant is Rowe's clear relevance to, and personal involvement in, certain contemporary offshoots from improvisation's family tree. Live digital electronics and noise music owe a barely recognised debt to players such as Rowe, Richard Teitelbaum, Paul Lytton and a host of others who developed the language of an improvised music that diverged from the African-American jazz tradition. It seems only right and proper that Rowe should be prominent in these current developments and *Harsh* offers a kind of satisfying closure, if I can borrow that nugget of American psychobabble, to the 'anti-jazz' trajectory begun 35 years ago.

If that threatens to wash him up on the treacherous sandbanks of nostalgia, his collaboration with Evan Parker on *Dark Rags* pushes back into deep water towards the far edges of the world. Like Rowe, Parker could be perceived to have been 'doing the same thing' for some decades with his saxophones, reeds, breath and finger dexterity. Humans tend to function in that way, moving towards inertia, growing less innovative, less physically mobile as they grow wiser and more individuated (as Jung would have said). Through its emphasis on the fluidity of settings, a fracturing of expectation, the endless possibilities of complexity generated by combining unpredictable materials, improvisation goes some way to addressing this otherwise miserable paradox of human existence.

Dark Rags is heartening for being so astonishingly rich in its formulations and psychic power, yet still true to the course set so distantly back in the 20th century. Psychic power; did I say that? Not a document for *The X-Files*, rather an illustration of the way in which subsets of human-ness such as emotion, intellect, instinct, psychosomatic, psychological, spiritual and chemical are more useful to bad doctors than music critics. There are passing suggestions of Indian classical music, both in the inventions of a soloist against a complex drone (which doesn't begin to describe the fluctuations of this musical relationship) and in the allusions of the album's title, but also in the depth of these explorations. Feverish and magical, Rowe fires coarse animal bellows, industrial engineering, death rattles, dream dialogues and sine moans at the lashing, twisting Anime plant monster that Parker unleashes. This is a mischievous dialogue too. Aware of Parker's natural tendency to build upon what he hears, Rowe feeds him "Strangers In The Night". When Rowe pulls back from an intense assault, leaving only a shivering metallic micro-dance in motion, Parker sidles out of hushed ruminations into the barest hint of "Fascinating Rhythm". For the record, virtually nothing else from the *Jazz Monthly* of 1965 has survived.

DAVID TODD

developing sequenced music. Ranging from seven to 13 minutes, the four pieces here are characterised by space, drift and prettiness, even as they grow out of straightforward song structures. Made by Henderson on vocals (sometimes barely more than a Louisville whisper), guitars, bass and keyboards, and Wallace on drums, percussion and bowed bass, the music was recorded as a demo and later remixed with Guy Fixsen of Laika. The second track "A Universal Hello", rebuilds itself shakily after collapsing under a landslide of My Bloody Valentine guitars. By its end, it is already beginning to wander a little. But the opening track "Static Phase" and the closing "Tape" are spot on, their lyrics mirroring and magnifying their music structures in their consideration of crystals, memory and black holes. They might use sticks and strings, but Larmousse's layered music, tempered with fuzz and tremolo effects, develops as unhurriedly as the loops and bleeps of Vladislav Delay's recent House project Luomo.

ANDI CHAPPLE

Thomas Lehn & Marcus Schmickler

Bart

ERSTWHILE 012 CD

The duo of Thomas Lehn and Marcus Schmickler is an example of two musicians from different backgrounds being drawn together by a common interest in improvisation and electronics. Lehn, a formally trained classical and jazz pianist, came to Improv through a passion for experimenting with analogue synthesizers, while Schmickler's road to freedom was via electroacoustics, House and Techno, which he has pursued in various operations associated with Cologne's A-Musik scene, notably the digital rock of his Pluramon alter-ego, and the more electroacoustically inclined Wabi Sabi. They met in December 1998 in the Music In Movement Electronic Orchestra (Mimeo), which featured a dozen or so improvising soundsmiths from London, Vienna, Amsterdam, Rives, Nantes, Berlin, Lisbon, and Cologne — where both Lehn and Schmickler are based.

But nothing on *Bart* suggests the influence of House or Techno — no danceable grooves here. For this is determinedly abstract fare produced by analogue and digital synths and computer — free improvisation followed by post-production treatments and editing. Sadly, there's not much resembling a well constructed sonic architecture either, little in their busy exchanges betrays any interest in sculpting memorable contrasts in dynamics, density and texture. The two quieter pieces are the most successful in sustaining a subtle atmosphere, especially the excellent, almost contemplative "Os", with its thoughtful layering of gentle oscillations, distant warbling and close-up snap, crackle and hiss.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Francisco López

Untitled #104

ALIEN8 ALIEN20 CD

As a teenager in love with Metal and hardcore punk, I thrilled to the 'harder/faster/louder' maxim, for a few years, every new release seemed to open onto a world more wondrously brutal than before. At the same time, something in the implicit teleology nagged at me: wasn't there a point where the music could be pushed no further, a physiological limit to velocity and volume?

You may be surprised to learn that Francisco López, known alternately for his barely audible soundworks and his anti-representational field recordings, is first to the finish line. *Untitled #104*, in stark contrast to his microscopist recordings, is composed entirely of Metal samples — blast beats, to be precise, those pummeling, double kickdrum driven sequences that give Metal its hurtling drive. And there's no doubting that this is Metal. The disc opens with five minutes of silence, punctuated intermittently by a clipped power chord, until the silence cracks open and the piece drops with all its weight: juggernaut rhythms and riffs tumbling over each other violently out of sync but still identifiable. It sounds as if 2D or 3D copies of the same record might be playing at once, occasionally falling into phase before slipping back into chaos. López fascinates in part because, despite his well-documented musical 'purism', he often turns to heavily overdetermined sources for his sound art — rainforest field recordings, samples of Metal. His is a radical decontextualisation, stripping the sound of any association with its original production, and resituating it in a field of pure sonic material. For 30 minutes, the world is noise. A variation of a composition Lopez played across Europe and the US last summer, this recording is less subtle than that live piece— instead of growing out of silence, it explodes into the sound field — but it maintains the density of those performances. Indeed, like *La Selva*, one of Lopez's jungle recordings, the disc's defining characteristic is its density. Rather than growing louder, or faster, or harder, it expands within, like a sponge absorbing every sound it touches, turning space into a solid.

And then the piece ends abruptly. But not the CD — there are a good ten minutes of silence: total silence, afterwards. Normally this might be considered a pressing error, or perhaps the secret passage to the hidden track, but not here. Absent of any such 'reward', what are we to make of this unusual home stretch? The nearly inaudible works of Lopez, Bernhard Gunter and others approach sound's glide into silence, and this is where they are so powerful, in harnessing that subtle tension. But empty of any sound, save the hum of the speakers, it begs the question of what to focus on, since said silence is obliterated by all of listening's attendant distractions. All I can say with certainty is that the absence makes you ache for the noise it displaces.

PHILIP SHERBURNE

Gary Lucas

Level The Playing Field — Early Hurlyburly 1988-1994

LAST CALL 3063132 CD

Gary Lucas

Street Of Lost Brothers

TZADIK TZ7145 CD

Gary Lucas is probably best known for his tenure as guitarist in Beefheart's Magic Band during the desert span of 1980-84, working the backwards solos in the wake of Zoot Horn Rollo and helping to prop up late works like *Doc At The Radar Station* and *Ice Cream For Crow*. After a lengthy absence A&Ring at CBS, he returned to the avant fringe as a solo performer and instigator of Gods And Monsters, an ever-evolving collective that has included percussionist Gregg Bendian and bassist Greg Cohen, Chicago cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm, and vocalists Mary Margaret O'Hara and Rolo McGinty. GAM also briefly sheltered Jeff Buckley until he gained the confidence to go out under his own name.

Lucas has often stated that since he was a kid his two overriding ambitions were to become "either a rabbi or a vampire". Well, he never did get to suck religiously but these twin obsessions — trashy SF splatter and spiritual mainlining — still pretty much define his aesthetic. The retrospective *Level The Playing Field* couples Gods And Monsters' *Bad Boys Of The Arctic* (1992) and *Gods And Monsters* (94) albums with two previously unreleased demos, "And You Will" and "Rise Up To Be", which date from Buckley's involvement with Lucas. They resurfaced later as Buckley's "Mojo Pin" and "Grace", respectively. In these early versions, minus the late singer's strangulated Freddie Mercuryisms, they're everything you wish John Fahey would get round to doing with six quietly buzzing electric strings. Elsewhere, amidst his surfed-up tremolo guitar and devotional quasi-Hendrix takes on the likes of Miles Davis's "Jack Johnson" and Suicide's "Ghost Rider", Lucas succumbs to an utterly bizarre cutesy MOR quirk. He is at his worst on the madcap "Exit, Pursued By A Bear", with vocalist Dina Emerson, from Meredith Monk's ensemble, which might as well be Edie Brickell or someone just as studiedly confused. That quirk is better behaved on "Vampire Circus", a piece that merely approximates the weird lumber of contemporary Pere Ubu.

Much more satisfying is his solo outing *Street Of Lost Brothers*, for John Zorn's Tzadik. Matching the emotional range of great Jewish cantors like Yossele Rosenblatt, Lucas moves effortlessly through giddy Yiddish knees-ups like "Yigdal" and "Mahzel Means Good Luck" into much more blasted territory. "It's Like A Wheel" is a speedy acoustic fantasia on dream themes recalling the work of guitarists Robbie Basho and Leo Kottke. It fades into "Let My People Go" where Ry Cooder-styled slide and harmonics summon the kind of black cloud darkening Dylan's apocalyptic reading of "Blind Willie McTell". But the gravy here is Lucas's version of "Ride Of The Valkyries", re-scored for the endtitles of a Spaghetti Western, where he shreds Wagner's bombastic march with atonal machine-gunning guitar. It takes a medley of Marx Brothers tunes to clear the smoke.

DAVID KEENAN

Clint Mansell/Kronos Quartet

Requiem For A Dream OST

NONESUCH 79611 CD

Ten years on from Uli Edel's compromised film version of *Last Exit To Brooklyn*, Darren Aronofksy's screen adaptation of Hubert Selby's *Requiem For A Dream* looks set to be true to both the spirit and the letter of the most remarkable writer in America still in possession of a pulse. In the first place, Aronofksy has cowritten the script with Selby himself, and assembled an impressive cast comprising Jared Leto as the young New York junkie with ambitions to be a bigtime dealer and Ellen Burstyn as his lonely mother, whacked out of her mind on slimming pills and wasting away as she awaits her chance to appear on a TV game show. He has also gone to Clint Mansell, front man and founding member of Pop Will Eat Itself, who was responsible for the soundtrack to Aronofsky's 1997 independent movie hit π.

Presented as a suite in three parts, following the characters' descent into self-delusion and bleak abandonment over the course of a year, from summer to winter, Mansell's score evokes the stern tenderness of Selby's original novel. The Kronos Quartet brings a restrained, plangent quality to their playing that counterpoints the implacably dry HipHop rhythms and desolate synthetic tones crowding the main title theme and its increasingly desperate variations. Short deranged bursts of Techno and demented klezmer further punctuate the music's gradual disintegration, as the quartet's urgent bowing becomes electronically strangled and distorted by painfully slow degrees. Not pretty by any means, but Mansell has fashioned out of such encroachingly ugly effects a work of tremendous sensitivity, discipline and thought.

KEN NOLLINGS

John Metcalfe

The Inner Line

BLACK BOX BBM1053 CD

Remember the strings bolstering the melancholy of Morrissey's wry lament for the coastal town they forgot to close down, on *Viva Hate*? New Zealander John Metcalfe, a graduate of the Royal Northern College Of Music, did the arrangements for that album, and played viola. He has subsequently worked with the likes of Blur, Catatonia, Simple Minds, The Cranberries and The Pretenders. He is currently a member of The Duke String Quartet.


Big Youth, Rotten youth

Big Youth
Natty Cultural Dread 1973-1976
BLOOD AND FIRE BAF034 3XCD

Among reggae DJs, if U Roy was bebop, then Big Youth was most definitely the new thing. As with many of the 'second generation' of Jamaican DJs Big Youth owed a massive stylistic debt to Daddy Hugh Roy, but through the early 70s he began to stretch the content of the standard toaster fare to address concerns which would elevate him to a peerless position in what was to become 'rebel music'. For it was Jah Youth who first looked beyond Jamaica to take on board the impact of the various black consciousness movements that had reverberated through the USA from the 60s through the 70s.

Manley Augustus Buchanan got his first break with the Tippertone Sound System, home of Jah Stitch and the legendary Wong Chu, DJ on the Perry mix of The Wailers' "Keep On Moving". Two DJ innovations marked Youth out. Firstly, he extended orthodox toasting and scat styles into a more abstract delivery with cries, moans, sobbing, whelps and all manners of vocal twists, eventually mutating into the chanting DJ style usually dedicated to more devotional material. Secondly, through the 70s Youth would also break out into vocals, the style that was later to become known as 'singjay'. But where he really changed reggae was in his avowed intent to deliver a conscious message and forward the rasta way of life, as opposed sticking to the usual DJ role of nicing up the dance. His big break in Jamaica came when Keith Hudson took Youth into the studio, together with a Honda motorbike, to rev up the DJ intro to the wonderful "S.90 Skank". The producer was so fond of Youth that he provided the red, gold and green insets in his front teeth which still shine today.

It is not possible to overestimate the influence of Big Youth on the increasingly disillusioned rock audience of the time and the newly emerging punk movement, who in the 70s turned to roots reggae for music which was honest, fresh, exciting and, well, exotic. Along with The Wailers' "Burning And Looting" and Burning Spear's "Marcus Garvey", Big Youth delivered beyond all expectations with the elemental "Dread Locks Dread" and was signed to Virgin by the newly crowned reggae A&R man, former Sex Pistol Johnny Rotten.

This is a top ranking release from Blood & Fire, their best so far alongside The Congos' *Heart Of The Congos* and the Yabby You compilation *Jesus Dread*. The set is lovingly and lavishly illustrated and annotated by Steve Barrow, with help from other Youth devotees. The 51 tracks are spread chronologically over three CDs: *Hot Stock 1973*, *Reggae Phenomenon 1973-1975* and *Hotter Fire 1975-1979*. The selection avoids major duplication with the more easily available material from the likes of Trojan, Frontline and Heartbeat, and instead concentrates on rare alternative versions and the best of the rest, which is extensive. As hardcore reggae fans will testify, this does not mean a dilution in quality.

So here we find one of the toughest and most seamingly righteous DJ declamations of all time when Youth rides Spear's "Marcus Garvey" rhythm as the extended "Mosiah Garvey". Investing in a clean Jamaican 7" copy of this tune on the Fox label would cost about the same as this set. Highlights are too many to list, but check "Things In The Light", the version to that most aching of Gregory Isaacs tunes, "Look Before You Leap"; compare and contrast the Youth with his mentor U Roy on the wonderfully lazy "Battle Of The Giants Pts 1 & 2"; or be forever saved with the mesmerising "I Light And I Salvation". The Percy Mayfield penned R&B hit for Ray Charles "Hit The Road Jack" is chanted to Carlton & The Shoes' "Love Me Forever" rhythm with Youth suddenly breaking into Bacharach & David's "What The World Needs Now Is Love" — this DJ recognises no stylistic boundaries.

It has been said that Big Youth, along with U Roy, has laid claim to be the progenitor of modern rap. It's a truth that needs no exploration as music as proud, joyful and continually relevant and profound as this requires no revisionist justifications. The Youth is now in the UK recording with Junior Delgado, chanting and singing in fine style, with shows promised next summer or even before. It's worth checking the contemporary world view of an artist whose cultural references stretch from John Coltrane and The Last Poets ("Jim Screechy") to "Spider Man Meets Hulk In A Rub A Dub Style".

STEVE BARKER

The Inner Line sounds like a resume of golden hours in Manchester. User-friendly chamber pieces, viola to the fore, that would not have seemed out of place on the Factory Classical label which Metcalfe set up at the end of the 1980s, rippling guitar streams recalling the years he spent playing and recording with Vini Reilly in Durutti Column, and crisp, percussive breaks evoking dancing days at the Hacienda. The 13 tracks on this album bear names as disparate as "Schoenberg", "Groovy Dog", "The Thrill Is Gone" and "Blue Ruby", but ultimately the titles seem incidental. The music flows as if following a single continuous conception, blending those basic ingredients, plus tasteful electronic embellishments and, occasionally, an ethereal voice. It's an arranger's album. The compositions don't stop the pulse. At first, they may even appear a touch anodyne, but there's more interest than mere mood in Metcalfe's skilled crafting of textures and judicious pacing of his materials. The combinations and contrasts found here may not be startlingly innovative, but they are artfully located within the auditory equivalent of well-drafted perspective drawings.

JULIAN COWLEY

Barbara Morgenstern
Fjorden
MONIKA 16 CD

There's more to the musical legacy of the GDR than dodgy state-supported hair bands now perversely rediscovered by disenfranchised East Germans. The musical instrument manufacturers Vermona produced home organs that have since captured the imagination of contemporary musicians such as the West German born, Berlin based singer-songwriter Barbara Morgenstern. On her 1998 debut, named for Vermona's model ET 6-1, Morgenstern demonstrated the proletarian Bontempi's sonic richness with occasional support from live drums, piano, beatbox, twangy guitar and her alternately breathy and conversational vocals. Both dense and playful, engaging from start to finish, *Vermona ET 6-1* deservedly became a touchstone of Berlin's avant pop/post-rock scene.

Fjorden is Morgenstern's second album proper, once again for Gudrun Gut's Monika imprint. The cover announces a change of direction. Gone are the trusty Vermona's knobs and switches. On *Fjorden*, Morgenstern stares out from underneath chestnut bangs like a lo-fi Suzanne Vega. Unfortunately, the lyric booklet makes it apparent that Morgenstern, unlike Vega, doesn't have all that much to say. In all fairness, she considers her lyrics more an additional tone colour than outright statements, but on *Fjorden* there's nothing that matches the earlier album's quietly harrowing, intimated rape of "Die Liebe" ("Love"), or the catchy chorus of "Im Flug". "Mjsnjedschaz" and "Happy End" are like those twee sappy ditties with which British synthpop groups used to top the US charts. (By contrast, the instrumental "Diskogeld" on *Vermona* is a witty homage to those groups' salad days.) Only the 60s single "Der Augenblick" ("The Moment") is lyrically interesting, a companion piece of sorts to *Vermona*'s "Das Wort" ("The Word").

Despite an expanded aural palette and all-star guests Pole (who also mastered both albums), Thomas Fehlmann and the ubiquitious Robert Lippok, *Fjorden* lacks *Vermona*'s cohesiveness and variety. The collaboration with Lippok, "37°" is atmospheric but forgettable, and songs such the Pole-produced "Tag Und Nacht" and "Dr Mr" augment the Vermona with static, insect noises, water sounds (a recurring motif), ZTT-like stabs of sampled brass, gospel intonations and reversed tape chatter, but the sounds are largely unaffecting. Exceptions are "Die Verabredung" ("The Appointment"), featuring a plaintive harmonica out of Stewart Copeland's *Rumble Fish* score and underlying

PHOTO DENNIS MORRIS

static, and "Der Wunsch Teil 3" ("The Wish Part 3"), a piano melody in minor worthy of Satie grounded by an insistent synth vamp and heartbeat rhythm

NATALIE GRAVENOR

Chris Morris
Blue Jam
WARP 79 CD

One of the weird miracles of 90s broadcasting was the 3am transmission of Chris Morris's *Blue Jam* series on Radio 1. Here they all are, the somnambulant, slow-voiced denizens of Morris's world dragged from the shadowy small hours and assembled under the spotlight of a CD. The mother who sues her baby for what it did to her figure, the porn actor drained to death by a three day long ejaculation, the acupuncturist with hammer and nine inch nails, the dodgy doctor unzipping his fly. The radio show resurfaced last year in the guise of the TV series *Jam*. Many grumbled that it wasn't funny, but Morris is a comic who aims at more than humour and much of the TV series had a savage beauty usually associated with independent film making. Spinning off like a wayward comet from the 90s obsession with comedy, Morris is a major talent working with brutal satire in disturbing areas on the edge of the permissible. Yet much of the writing here is immaculate, particularly "Porn", the pseudo-documentary about a crisis in the sex film industry and "Suicide Journalist", about the columnist who becomes a celebrity by writing up his imminent self-decapitation.

Several sketches here break taboos on children's behaviour – these work better in audio form where we can hear the voices are done by adult actors. The visible presence of children in the TV version was an uncomfortable distraction.

The underscoring musical soundtrack is provided by cut-up Ambient tracks from Labradford, Funki Porcini, Aphex Twin, Fila Brazilia and many others. And a reminder of who the really obscene, creepy people are comes in Morris's surreal interview with Andrew Morton, author of books about Princess Diana. Morris switches from obsequious praise to insult, and back again, in mid-sentence, and conjures up a computer game called *Last Chase* on the Internet as a thoroughly confused Morton splutters indignantly "Does that really exist?"

CLIVE BELL

Sainkho Namtchylak
Stepmother City
PONDEROSA 003 CD

Namtchylak/Hirsch/Bott
Temenos Original Soundtrack
LEO LR303 CD

Tuvan composer and singer Sainkho Namtchylak is often apostrophed as the Far Eastern equivalent of Bjork. As in most other facile equations, too much reality gets lost in the comparison. Namtchylak's musical practice has its basis in traditional Tuvan techniques — with a particular emphasis on overtone play — but that's really only a starting point. Following on from her 1999 solo album *Naked Spirit*, *Stepmother City* similarly utilises an impressive and far ranging set of influences and ideas within a context that has a specific leaning towards — well, if not a transcendental realm, then certainly something beyond the mundane.

It's surprising how immediately effective the album is. An opening throaty growl is softened by some loose treatments and arrangements that harness an eclectic array of traditional instrumentation, percussion and, at times, generous helpings of digital dirt. One standout track, "Lonely Soul", progresses from a delicately picked out intro into a swooping looped vocal that speeds up into a manic chirruping cut-up fest. Namtchylak's vocalising moves from drones to chord-stretching shrieks in a manner that locates her more recent methods within a natural continuum. *Stepmother City* challenges the listener in all the right places. "Dance Of Eagle" locks into a mountain trail groove, 'Boomerang" is a recoil of rubbery basslines, but it's the newly wrought soul of "Old Melodie" and "Tuva Blues" that teases out tantalising directions for the future.

Namtchylak puts the spatial qualities of her music to good use on *Temenos*, the soundtrack to Nina Danino's 1998 impressionistic film about faith and reverie in the Balkans. Taking its title from a Greek word originally used to designate a sacred enclosure, the temenos here is a form of suspension that is as actual as it is symbolic. It is a space in which cultures — and religion — can intersect. Danino herself provides brief spoken word introductions to many tracks, but the overall effect oscillates between the elemental — and here Namtchylak comes into her own, voicing winds and groans like some *genius loci* — and the formal strains introduced by Early Music expert and soprano Catherine Bott. Bott's renditions of the epilogues *Planctus* and a Bach aria are superbly placed tracks. But *Temenos* acquires its eerie coherence from settings created by improvising vocalist Shelley Hirsch and Namtchylak's electroacoustic compositions, incorporating location recordings, radio excerpts and hyperventillations. The potent mix ensures that these atmospheres linger in the memory long after the closing credits have rolled.

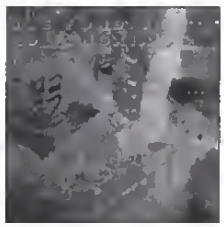
LOUISE GRAY

Markus Nikolai
Back
PERLON 2000 CD

Born of Matt Herbert's off-kilter rhythms, and charactensed by stripped down percussion, clipped vocals and the most judicious blush of occasional colour, a new flavour of House music has been emerging on labels like

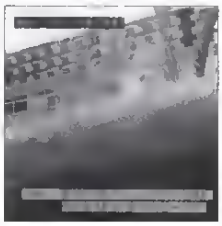
LEO RECORDS
Music for the inquiring mind and the passionate heart

LEO LAB
NEW RELEASES



LEO LAB CD 069
JOE FONDA/XU FENGXIA
DISTANCE

A veteran of new music scene, member and leader of many groups, Joe Fonda, is trying to tame a new exciting talent of Xu Fengxia. The subtitle of this CD could have been "Shanghai Meets New York in Bielefeld". Recorded live in the Bielefeld club Jazz Bunker, the music is a totally original blend of the bass and guzheng, and an overtone singing on top of it. The joy and wisdon of improvised music which knows no borders.



LEO LAB CD 070
NOT MISSING DRUMS PROJECT
POSITION/DARK/RED

The third CD by "Not Missing Drums Project" led by the saxophonist Joachim Gies and cellist Thomas Bohm-Christl. Live recordings from two concerts, 11 musicians taking part, the wealth of natural colours within the ensemble — vocals, strings, wind instruments — is complemented by the artificial shades of synth and sampling. The classically trained voice of Ute Doring generates both a post-modern romanticism and a sensual nocturnal luminocity. Utterly original as all previous CDs by this group.



LEO LAB CD 071
MISHA FEIGIN/CRAIG HULTGREN/
LADONNA SMITH
THEY ARE WE ARE

In the wake of his raving succes (duos with Elliot Sharp, Eugene Chadbourne, LaDonna Smith, etc., Leo Lab CD 060 - Both Kinds of Music), this is a trio recording inspired by the Russian emigree Misha Feigin who plays classical guitar and balalaika while Craig plays cello and LaDonna viola and violine. 12-page booklet contains a short 'story by Misha (he happens to be a talented writer) and some of his poetry. He also adds his spontaneous singing to a couple of improvisations.



LEO LAB CD 072
HANS TAMMEN/DOMINIC DUVAL
THE ROAD BENDS HERE

This is a duo recording of the highly original guitarist Hans Tammen (Leo Lab CD 054 - The Cat's Pyjamas) and the better known bassist Dominic Duval. If you have not yet heard Hans Tammen, you must. "Recent years have seen a slew of fine free guitarists emerge, from the ubiquitous O'Rurke to Alan Licht to Leonid Soybelman, but nothing they've done so far packs this kind of punch, and Uncle Pat Metheny's occasional forrays into noise (either solo or with Derek Bailey) pale into insignificance" (Dan Warburton, "Signal to Noise"). Say no more.

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the compiler

New compilations: reviewed, rated, reviled

For fanatical completism and sheer bizarreness (a country label run by a transsexual — you would never get that sort of thing in Nashville) Germany has the reissue market cornered. After brilliant collections of Vietnamese buskers and Bavarian courtyard singing, the Munich-based Trikont label stakes its claim for greatness with its Flashbacks series. Six snapshots of America between the two wars, Flashbacks covers similar ground to those *Please Warm My Weiner* collections of smutty, drug taking blues records, but with a streak of Harry Smith's polymorphous perversity. ***High & Low: Drug Songs*** (Trikont USD275 CD) shifts moods more often than a commissioning editor on charlie, sandwiching Wanng's Pennsylvanians' positively Disneyian "Let's Have Another Cup Of Coffee" between Cab Calloway's zenith of hepdom, "The Ghost Of Smokey Joe", and Victoria Spivey & Lonnie Johnson's monument of perdition, "Dope Head Blues".

Crazy & Obscure: Novelty Songs (USD276 CD) is more like a house party with a big tank of nitrous planted slap in the middle of the room. Unlike such travesties as "I've Got A Brand New Combine Harvester", the novelty records collected here really are a barrel of laffs. Included are such absurdities as Groucho Marx's "I'm Against It" and, um, a version of "I Scream, You Scream". The real highlight, though, is Lonzo & Oscar's delirious "I'm My Own Grandpa".

The nefarious goings-on that led to Lonzo & Oscar's predicament are detailed on ***Hot & Sexy: Copulation Blues*** (USO277 CD), a collection of filthy ditties and single entendres done with winks so sly and smiles so broad that even Mary Whitehouse wouldn't mind. It's not all salacious romping (though, with the most outrageous record until 2 Live Crew came on the scene, Lucille Bogan's "Shave 'Em Dry", on hand there's plenty of that too) it includes Alberta Hunter's plea for racial equality disguised as a sex rap, "You Can't Tell The Difference After Dark".

Flashbacks isn't all Saturday night. Sunday morning comes into the picture with ***Gospel & Prayers: Halleluja*** (USD279 CD). Covering 1926-46, *Halleluja* is a perfect summary of gospel and jubilee singing before Mahalia Jackson made her breakthrough in 1947. Some of music's greatest voices are here, as is a rare treat: a pre-Sam Cooke Soul Stirrers track featuring the legendary RH Harris, perhaps gospel's most influential figure aside from composer Thomas A Dorsey.

"Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition" begins ***Hitler & Hell: American War Songs*** (USD2BD CD). While novelty numbers like "Last Page Of Mein Kampf" and "Goodbye Mama, I'm Off To Yokohama" are the most familiar of this remarkable mini-genre, there was some space for moving numbers like Reverend JM Gates's devastating sermon on Hitler, Leadbelly's "Mr Hitler" and The Golden Gate Quartet's swinging but sombre version of "Stalin Wasn't Stallin'".

Where the war songs are largely peppy, ***Blue & Lonely: Heartbreakers*** (USD278 CD) is all stylised depression masked by a cloud of smoke and mood lighting. Despite the presence of classics by Blind Willie Johnson, Bessie Smith and Mezz Mezzrow, the most remarkable song here might be Dinah Shore's version of "Blues In The Night". Known largely for her old daytime talk-variety show on American television and for her patronage of women's professional golf, here Shore comes off like a proto-Julie London. Too hip.

Will obscure electronica be repackaged by obsessive collectors with full colour reproductions of iMacs and Air Maxes and screen grabs from ProTools sometime in the distant future? Since comps like ***Cashier Escape Route*** (City Centre Offices CCD/TDWER8LDCK002 CD) exist now, probably not, but it's pretty definitive nevertheless. Featuring tracks from Lexaurnculpt, To Rococo Rot and Pole among others, this covers the electronics terrain with enough aplomb to have made it the *Back From The Crypt*, if not the *Nuggets*, of the 22nd century.

If comps like *Pebbles* collect obscurities that are too good not to have been heard by anyone other than the people who made them, then ***Find More Hits*** (Lucky Kitchen LKDDB CD) features recordings that were never meant to be heard by anyone at all. 'Life recordings' — short order cooks, flutes from a Renaissance Fayre and friends singing Woody Guthrie — are reprocessed by electricians like Matmos, I-Sound and Hrvatski to create a moving, opiated experience — like sleepwalking through Monet's lily pads.

If you really want to wow your friends and influence people, however, look no further than ***Disco Hot Disco*** (Strut 008 CD/2XLP). A veritable who's who of New York's avant garde community — Yoko Ono, Arthur Russell, Don Cherry, Bill Laswell — putting on flares and afro wigs and heading down to the Paradise Garage more fun than *My Dinner With Andre*. □

Reviewed by Peter Shapiro

Perlon, Playhouse, Kompakt and Force Tracks. Caught at the intersection of Deep House, minimal Techno and glitch-ridden microsound, this latest strain might best be described as 'Microhouse'.

First released last year by the pioneering Microhouse label Perlon, Markus Nikolai's "Bushes" introduced the concept to a wider audience beyond the circle of minimal House devotees. A weirdly hybrid minimal groover, it regularly found itself dropped between Deep Housers, like a scrap of sandpaper tossed in to a pile of cashmere and silk, eventually worming its way into an astonishing number of charts.

On his debut album *Back*, Nicolai extends the agenda set out on Perlon's earlier releases, wrapping chugging rhythms in ribbons of filtered disco keys and tying off the package with punchy, hyperactive basslines. The "Bushes" single is included, remixed by Derrick Carter, who excises the lush, Latin guitars and leaves all the angles and edges jutting out like the ribs of a shipwreck at low tide. Elsewhere Nikolai indulges some 80s fascinations with the new wave electro of "Backbeat" and the squelchy bassline of "Passion", cribbed straight from Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean". What really makes the record, though, are the vocals. "Superstar" and "Chickflick" feature Ladomat-friendly monotone voiceovers and on "Paradise", Nikolai chops up scraps of vocals and employs them as rhythmic elements, while working up to the hook with a series of breaths and barely expressed half-syllables. In the process, he has invented a highly suggestive — if slightly cheeky — soul music, complete with a slinky diva refrain soaring jubilantly over the bursts of organ, vibraphone and vocal snippets that form the track's pointillist underpinning.

PHILIP SHERBURNE

Luigi Nono

Voices Of Protest

MODE 87 CD

Few composers of the post-war generation have addressed political issues with such passion and commitment as Luigi Nono. In *La Fabbrica Illuminata* (1964) he processed recordings of factory noises to convey the alienation and suffering of Italian workers, while *Musica Manifesto No 1* (1968-69) expressed his support for the student uprising of May 1968. Beginning some ten years before his death in 1990, however, the confrontational gestures of his earlier works made way to a more meditative, introspective approach. The *Voices Of Protest* CD comprises pieces from both periods of Nono's career.

It opens with *A Floresta E Jovem E Cheja De Vida* (1965-66), an orally transmitted work with no completed score, which Nono subjected to the constant revisions resulting from the experiments he carried out on it with his performers. Dedicated to the National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam, it comprises texts by the likes of Fidel Castro and Franz Fanon, and a tape section featuring clarinettist William Smith, soprano Liliana Poli and the voices of actors from The Living Theatre. The result is a fascinating, ever-changing interplay of music and text, of recorded and live performance, interspersed with dramatic shrieks, violent crashes and eerie, desolate tones. Together with clarinettist Carol Robinson, the Paris-based vocal ensemble Voxnova gives an arresting performance of this harrowing work. Voxnova performs the two remaining pieces on the CD with equal panache. On *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), a lone soprano's extreme crescendoes and decrescendoes conjure the plight of Algerian women. The text isn't always comprehensible, but the expressiveness of Nono's music speaks far louder than words. The quieter, more contemplative *¿Donde Estas Hermano?* (1982) is dedicated to the disappeared in Argentina. Between deep shafts of silence, three sopranos and a mezzo soprano celebrate freedom and its triumph over death. The piece may lack the stridency of his earlier work, but as a political statement it is no less effective.

RAHMA KHAZAM

Bob Ostertag

Verbatim Flesh And Blood

SEELAND/RASTASCAN 512/BROO35 CD

This is the final CD in Bob Ostertag's landmark four CD project that takes a trio of world class improvisors — Phil Minton (vocals), Mark Dresser (double bass) and Gerry Hemingway (drums) — and switches them back and forth from the real to the virtual. The first of the series, *Say No More*, remains its defining statement. There, Ostertag created the computerised illusion of group playing in a way that was tighter and more compositionally minded than would have been otherwise possible, even for the most advanced improvisors, while partly drawing from the players' own idiosyncratic vocabularies. He crafted a mirage of a group playing together both in unconnected 'parallel' and tight synchronicity.

By the time the project had reached the third phase, *Verbatim*, the studio composition no longer sounded like humanly produced improvisation. It played with a range of moods and dark atmospheres, with speed-changed and slurred samples that were evidently the product of machine. *Verbatim Flesh And Blood* is the live realisation where the musicians attempt to recreate the piece with the aid of both a score and prior rehearsal time. Ostertag joins the live ensemble on sampler to play the more manipulated passages. Musically, its fortunes are mixed. While *Verbatim* and its live twin contain some of the most extraordinary and exciting music ever recorded, they also, frustratingly, contain some of the most lacklustre. It's as if, seven years down the line, Ostertag had run out of steam with the project. By "Paris Green" and "Middle Stone", it appears to be collapsing in on itself.

The action seems to disappear into the echoing distance, compositional ideas fuzz into backwards samples, and the CD ends with a whimper rather than a bang

But on moments such as "Cornflower", the music has an intensity of purpose that reaches for the sublime Some of the most successful work is with Phil Minton's voice Ostertag has distilled Minton's language — his wheezing, Donald Duck noises, growls and wailing — into the ultimate in Dada sound poetics On "Smoke", Phil duets with a filigree-light percussive sample of himself splayed, frayed, magnified breathy utterances, a life compressed and reflected in a thousand mirrored shards "Ink", though, is the real coup It's a superb Gothic cameo with Minton as an avenging, decrepit, hunchback lurching among the gravestones Menacing evocative and with a wicked sense of humour

PHIL ENGLAND

Pimmon
Assembler

FALLT F 0012 0001 CD

As Pimmon Sydney based Paul Gough has released a succession of excellent releases in the last year *Assembler* is his debut for Fallt, and is meant to be listened to in conjunction with' a bunch of extras, including some MP3 files and SimpleTextAudio Unfortunately, the only extra element I could find on the Website (www fallt com) was a series of visually engaging graphic scores (although there was no indication of how these actually related to the aural element)

The album opens with "macro prologue", featuring the most aggressive noise and static of its 12 tracks, designed, presumably, to weed out the fainthearted However, as the CD progresses, the delicacy of the relationships between metallic whines, screaming highpitched tones and layer upon layer of static develops into an varied and engaging album Juxtapositions within and between tracks map out a narrative of its internal logic, which is more about poise and reflection than the macho endurance test this kind of release often becomes By shifting incessantly between the crunching abstraction of digital noise and the emotive warmth of an evident human presence, *Assembler* avoids the parallel pitfalls of predictability sickly sweet sentimentality or becoming just another slice of electronics for the boys

On "Repeat" heavy static pulses fluttering with chaotic regularity make way for a soaring, elegiac choir of processed signals For 12 minutes, these loops evoke a melancholy dreamscape This is followed by the Zen minimalism of 'Xlat", featuring an unlikely detuned anthemic motif that stutters and loops over minute shifts in the soundscape, not unlike an outtake of Stockhausen's *Hymnen* These tracks close on a harder note by fading up a barrage of digital noise or a piercing tinnitus ring punctuating the calmness of the drone

By the time you are finished listening to *Assembler*, its opening warning has been transformed into a composition where the attention to detail and flare for the dramatic is positively baroque This is a rare album that bypasses the aridity of formalist digitalia in favour of a warmer, more variegated and personalised approach

KEN NORTHWICK

Pizzicato Five
The Fifth Release From Matador

MATADOR OLE415 2V CD

Taken on its glossy fashion-plate surface, Yasuharu Konishi and Maki Nomiya's latest release for Matador comes across as a hectic tribute to the sweet and crowded mirages created at Rome's Cinecittà film studios during the 1960s and 70s Hold some of these wry pop pastiches up to the light however, and it quickly becomes clear that this sunny overseas production is still scouting props and locations among the Union Jack carrier bags, groovy Peter Blake posters and white E-type Jags featured on their previous album, the expansive and playfully psychedelic *Playboy & Playgirl* In fact, it's hard to shake off the suspicion that *The Fifth Release* contains more than a few offcuts and outtakes that never quite made the the final cut of its more assured and inventive predecessor Certainly, the fuzzed-up, fake heavy rock of "Loudland!" and the charming woodwind arrangements on "La Guerre Est Finie", recalling Appletree Theatre at their most icily winsome, wouldn't have been out of place on the earlier disc At one point Mademoiselle Nomiya belatedly declares herself to be "A 20th Century Girl" in a foolhardy gesture of the boldest most unblinking irony On the plus side, the arrangement on "Wild Strawberries" maintains an elegantly stark and impassive presence Elsewhere, 'Tout, Tout Pour Ma Cherie" has the kinetic knockabout zest of Izumi Kobayashi's themes for the Japanese 1980s cartoon series, *Urusei Yatsura* and only a humourless churl could complain that there's no fun to be had around this part of the Latin Quarter All the same, it's no *Playboy & Playgirl*, even if parts sound as though they very nearly might have been

KEN HOLLINGS

Andrew Poppy
Time At Rest Devouring Its Secret

SOURCE RESEARCH SIR COM1 CD

After studying with Cornelius Cardew associate Dave Smith in the early 70s, Andrew Poppy made his mark on the British contemporary classical scene with two mid-80s albums of chamber works for ZTT, the label made (in)famous by Frankie Goes To Hollywood (or was it the other way round?) Through Smith, Poppy had been introduced to the work of Terry Riley, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, minimalist composers who would influence the shape of his own compositions Since the 80s, he has composed further works for various chamber ensembles, solo piano, a string quartet, music for theatre, film and television, and the opera *Ophelia/Ophelia* which, building on his experience of pop studio production methods at ZTT, saw him using vocal doubletracking and sampling

The studio is also responsible for the construction of Poppy's latest release, *Time At Rest Devouring Its Secret* a 35 minute, single movement work of "basically one texture" inspired by Riley's *In C*, Reich's *Drumming* and Feldman's *For Samuel Beckett* Sadly, Poppy's informative press notes are not reproduced within the booklet, but they reveal that the piece is the result of two studio mixes, the second asynchronously superimposed over the first to create a canonic structure — not easily detectable The light and lean grandeur of the orchestration recalls Takemitsu, and its sampled instrumentation favours strings, an unpredictable drip-drop pizzicato of deep double bass and high pitched violin (or harp?), mingling with tintinnabulous percussives Overhead, clouds of strings and electronics drift and repeat (again difficult to detect) in a kind of bittersweet, melancholy ecstasy that plays some fascinating psychoacoustic 'games' with time/space and stasis/movement Bewitching beautifully crafted and highly addictive

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Stephen Prina
Vinyl II

ORGAN OF CORTI 21 CD

An alumnus of Mayo Thompson's more recent incarnations of The Red Krayola, artist Stephen Prina recently got the chance to reconcile his work in painting and photography with his musical ambitions, when he was commissioned to make a 16mm film and a 20 minute composition both called *Vinyl II* This CD consists of three takes of the soundtrack, structured and edited so one tails seamlessly into the next Scored for string quartet and French horn, the repetitions of Prina's largo art song dislocate time in a style that recalls the elliptical structure of the Alain Resnais film *Last Year At Marienbad*

All three takes were recorded in two galleries at the new J Paul Getty Museum, a massive hilltop edifice hovering above the west side of Los Angeles The microphone positioning for the French horn captures the ambience afforded by the gallery's unique marble-heavy construction

Though Prina's melodies are redolent of classic Los Angeles songsmiths like Burt Bacharach, Jim Webb and Brian Wilson, the terse cyclical phrasing of his string charts recalls Robert Kirby's arrangements for Nick Drake When the composer turns vocalist on the final third of each take, his singing is mixed more and less on a par with the instruments, conveniently masking any flaws in his impassioned performance After his final



the boomerang

New reissues: rated on the rebound

First Liquid Liquid, then ESG, and now the second hardest working man in showbusiness, **James Chance** gets to have his punk-funk legacy reassessed Part of ROIR's essential reissue programme (are they ever going to re-release that Shox Lumania tape?) *White Cannibal* (ROIR RUS B267 CD) was recorded in late 1980 and early 1981 at Big Apple boites The 80's and Peppermint Lounge, with a version of The Contortions that included such luminaries as guitarist Bern Nix and trombonist Joseph Bowie Chance's knowing honky jive can be a bit grating, but the angular, pixellated funk and astringent aggro jazz that surrounds him is anything but art-schtick.

A rather different take on reinventing jazz can be found on **Alexander Von Schlippenbach & Sven Åke Johansson**'s classic slice of European free improvisation, *Live 1976/77* (FMP 111 CD), where the weight of history is absent and replaced by the unbounded joy of the moment. Drummer Johansson in particular is not going to suppress his glee and excitement just to avoid looking ungainly or silly He's equally willing to take to the accordion and try his hand at singing, while pianist Von Schlippenbach rips Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" apart Mainly, it's a propulsive torrent of ideas ecstatically expressed The energy barely sags right up to the masterful take on "Over The Rainbow" that closes the CD

Mouse On Mars's Andi Toma and Jan St Werner went over the rainbow to the Red Planet to find their ravishingly luxuriant take on electronic minimalism *Instrumentals* (Domino WIGBB CD) contains tracks recorded between 1995-97 (previously only available on vinyl) that do anything but scurry behind the wainscotting when they hear people coming Instead Toma and St Werner give you a big, sloppy wet kiss and prance around in their thong-th-thong-thong-thongs on the shores of the Sea Of Tranquility

Still waving not drowning this early in their career, **The Beach Boys**' *Studio Sessions 61-62* (NMC PILOT62 CD) salvages a previously unheard cache of master tapes, starting with an early version of "Surfin' USA" from when they were The Pendletones Changing their name soon after, they continued to experiment with teenage harmony style, vocally shaping leader Brian Wilson's fantasies about cars, surf and girls into immaculate works of pop art. On these rough tapes, you can almost physically feel Brian's guiding hand hovering over the sessions.

By the 70s they were seemingly washed up, the BW engineered mid-60s masterpieces soured by the increasingly eccentric behaviour that kept him out of the studio, leaving the others confused and floundering The latest batch of Capitol reissues, focusing on the last releases on their own Brother Records mostly sound cynically flawed However, the remaining B-Boys surprised fans and critics alike with 1973's *Holland* (Capitol 7243525694 CD), a mature, powerful set of originals — coupled here with Brian's somewhat out of sync "Mt Vernon Fairway (A Fairy Tale In Several Parts)", originally issued as an accompanying EP Brian was back in for 1997's *The Beach Boys Love You* (Capitol 7243527945 CD), a marginally interesting set of sentimental ballads and nostalgic soft rockers, but he made his 'official' full comeback with 1988's *Brian Wilson* (Warner/Rhino Promo CD), his spiritual health' solo album made under the influence of his controversial personal mind medic Eugene E Landy and here reissued with 15 bonus tracks that unbalance the original 11 and amplify his personal agony Although it has its moments (the epic "Rio Grande"), his performance throughout smacks of frailty and forced recuperation It makes for uneasy listening and bad vibrations.

No strangers to bad vibes themselves, **Laibach** have been accused of everything from fomenting the Yugoslav breakup to crimes against music But by 1987's *Krst Pod Triglavom-Baptism* (Sub Rosa SUBCD0019 CD), they and Bauhaus-like associates NSK had arrived at an uneasy truce with Yugoslavia's unravelling communist state *Baptism* was NSK's most fully realised Gesamtkunstwerk, wherein its theatre, dance, art, design, film and architecture depts mounted a psychic snapshot of Slovenia's nationhood myths and aspirations, forged under Austrian, Italian, German and Soviet domination Just as NSK unfurled a 'retrogarde' parade of lost avant gardes, through which they returned the Slovenian nation to the sites of its past traumas, so Laibach's music folded Romantic bombast, bathos, fanfares, hunting horns, martial rhythms and rock electronics into the blood cement binding NSK as a model Utopia with reality's totalitarian distortions That the best bit comes from Carl Orff's *Comedy For The End Of Time* in no way detracts from Laibach's achievement. □ *Reviewed by Phil England Biba Kopf, Edwin Pouncey and Peter Shapiro*

phrase the violins begin their descent through sliding harmonics into the honeyed drone through which the piece starts up again Pinna has stated that "for me those are the only two things that exist — drones and love songs" True to his word, *Vinyl II* locates the comfortable middle ground between art gallery minimalism and car radio romance

RICHARD HENDERSON

Red
Felk

RECTANGLE INTERNATIONAL RECBB2 CD

Felk is the work of Olivier Lambin, a 32 year old singer/guitarist from Lille, France, and was recorded "at home directly onto his PC (his four-track having melted)" before he pressed it into the hand of Rectangle's Noel Akchote one night in Lyon and "disappeared into the crowd" Imagine what might have been if Robert Johnson had ProTools, or if Ian Curtis had been born an Alabama sharecropper's son in 1910, or what might yet be if Pita remixes *Blind Joe Death*, or David Byrne takes to the road aged 80 with a broken acoustic guitar, or if Elvis isn't dead but is still secretly recording in a shack somewhere in Montana Quite simply, it's extraordinary

Mixed into Lambin's minimal arrangements is strange 'digital annoyance' from David Grubbs, but also the sounds of his children at play *"Chouette! On a un cave!"* ("Great! We've got a cellar!") cries daughter Margot, while daddy sings *"I know I'm so ugly"* with painful sincerity These are real basement tapes whose stark juxtapositions of childhood innocence and bleak adult reality — children I am now what you will become — recall another forgotten masterpiece, The Stockholm Monsters' *Decalogue* Lambin's version of Hank Williams's "I Saw The Light" is breathtaking, as the voice pushes way below its normal tessitura until it breaks apart (an old Nick Cave trick), while the barest chordal strumming carries what's left of the song against a stripped down, digitised rhythm track worthy of Pan Sonic Talking Heads annoyingly jaunty "Road To Nowhere" here becomes a gin-soaked drawl, a Raymond Carver short story made audible, Buffy Sainte-Marie at 16rpm, with desperate smears of fuzz guitar, too drunk to pluck, amplifier hum, traffic noise in the rain outside, the baby's crying and who gives a fuck This introspection is universal and timeless the English lyrics are no cynical plot to gain market share outside France (Red's voice may be as intense and tortured as Beth Gibbons's, but he knows he's never going to chart like Portishead) With its superimposition of disparate elements — analogue/digital, hi-fi/no-fi, human emotion/impersonal technology — Pere Ubu, Joy Division and Arto Lindsay all come to mind, but something here goes even deeper at times than the mighty Ian Curtis down into what Barthes once called 'the grain of the voice Great stuff

DAN WARBURTON

Jon Rose
The Hyperstring Project

RECOMMENDED RÉRJR6 CD

Violinist Jon Rose's *The Hyperstring Project* is a foray into a "new dynamic of rogue counterpoint" Using software developed in collaboration with Amsterdam's STEIM, Rose integrates an impressive inventory of samples into his violin improvisations through a 'MIDIfied' bow measuring bow pressure, an 'accelerometer' measuring speed and movement of the bowing arm, and a bank of foot pedals Additionally, Rose has embedded various random functions into the software that can abruptly and radically change the shape of an improvisation And, if this was not enough Rose also employs another of his inventions, the 'Whipolin', a hollowed out, seven string cello fitted with offcentre hurdygurdy wheels coated with anything ranging from hair to spikes

All of this would provide the momentary fascination of a clever windup toy, were it not for Rose's considerable assets as a violinist and an improvisor Rose is also an erudite musicologist who can connect the dots between Palestrina, Balinese gamelan and one man bands to formulate a relevant composite aesthetic of polyphonic improvisation Thus, this is a very substantial body of work. Rose's improvisations are immediately engaging as they mix unaltered samples of harpsichords and voices, pure and manipulated string sounds, and electronic concoctions, with Rose's 'pure vanilla' violin and tenor violin More impressively, 'rogue counterpoint' transcends cacophony Though often dense, there are frequent tangible relationships between acoustic and digital materials, which, in the greater scheme of things extends the horizon for Hyperstring technology far beyond buzzworthy 'device of the month' status

Surprisingly Rose opens the album with a lengthy, reposed, no-Hyperstrings-attached solo, in which he acoustically demonstrates the chain reaction between bow pressure, timbral contrasts and counterpoint The full techno onslaught is further forestalled by a drony piece for Whipolin He then eases into the Hyperstring technology, beginning with a semblance of a string trio before starting the real fireworks, which continue at a fairly fast and furious pace for the duration of the programme Rose also occasionally manually triggers the MIDIfied bow to create bristling stand-alone electronic pieces *The Hyperstring Project* is a wild ride

BILL SHOEMAKER

John Schott
Shuffle Play Elegies For The Recording Angel

NEW WORLD 80548 CD

"It's a commonplace of art history that photography had a great effect on modernist painting, but the obvious analogy, that of

recording and modern music, hasn't received, to my mind, serious consideration." John Schott's claim is an exaggeration. Douglas Kahn's recent and frustrating *Noise Water Meat* (see Print Run, *The Wire* 194) is one exception that springs to mind. But his great love of old recordings has led to an album bursting with inspiration and bubbling over with ideas. *Shuffle Play* could be filed under 'Americana', but that would be to neglect its progressive intent. It's a leap in complexity and achievement, even from the outstanding *Ghost Of Electricity* by Junk Genius, the group featuring Schott and clarinettist Ben Goldberg (*The Wire* 197). If that album was, as he said, "in some measure a commentary on American folk music", the scope here is wider, the intention more ambitious.

Schott became obsessed with the African-American folksong "Poor Mourner" in an 1897 recording. He offers three realisations of it here: two featuring Goldberg, the most frequent member of the album's large and shifting personnel together with Schott, who is mostly on guitar but also organ, percussion and samples. There's the most primitive vinyl applique — the hissing of Edison era recordings — on the eerie "Overture" and the start of the first version of "Poor Mourner". Its electrifying opening is followed by Dan Plonsey's powerful, wailing alto sax. "Poor Mourner Snorkel', a hokey exercise in accelerando and rallentando.

Various elegies form another leitmotif. On "Elegy America", a laidback Country blues overlays a recording purportedly of Walt Whitman reciting "America" which was in fact faked in the 1940s in a cause celebre by down and out New York elevator operator Rosco Haley. "Elegy Noel Josephs And Jesse Walter Fewkes" begins with a Passamaquoddy Indian religious ritual recorded in 1890, merged with "Yankee Doodle Dandy" recorded four years later with, I think, Goldberg's contra-alto clarinet providing comments.

Many of the juxtapositions are inspired: for instance, Richard Jose's Victor recording of "Nearer My God To Thee" from 1906 has an eerie sonic overlay that's quite magical. But a lot of tracks are at a tangent to the archival inspiration. "Temple Blocks', featuring Karen Stackpole on same, and Jenny Scheinman's solo 'Violin', an introduction to the almost serial modernist "Second Graph' by a large ensemble. Other performers include Rob Burger on accordion and Matt (son of Dave) Brubeck on cello. The listener is left with the feeling that Schott has tried to cram in everything he wanted to say about the history of recording into one CD, which means this remarkable release can't be properly discussed in a short review. An essential album.

ANDY HAMILTON

Matthew Shipp Trio
Prism

HATOLOGY 5[illegible] CD

Last year the prolific Matthew Shipp decided to take a sabbatical as far as recording was concerned. The hiatus is partly being filled by music that has not previously been issued, but *Prism*, dating from March 1993, was formerly out on Brinkman Records. Taken live in NYC, it features longtime musicial partner William Parker on bass and drummer Whit Dickey. All three were then part of David S Ware's quartet.

Shipp has linked innovative black music to the archetype of a secret Atlantian mathematician. His own dazzling keyboard equations would strain any theorem. He is often likened to Cecil Taylor: the similarities such as they are show themselves most evidently in plunging lower register chords and splashing swirls of higher notes. But Shipp is less percussive, laying out many more legato swathes of melody. Only in brief flourishes, out of context, could they be confused: though each player has a voracious appetite for collecting artefacts from the broad tradition of modern music and testing them to destruction. They are both iconographers and iconoclasts whose attentions stalk the boundaries of jazz, 20th century composition and beyond. For Shipp, the legitimate targets include Ellington, Monk, Bartok, Webern, Scriabin, Bud Powell, Andrew Hill and Hendrix but the principal catalyst here is Parker. Where so many post-60s high energy improvising units revolve around a horn/percussion axis, Shipp engages most fruitfully with the bass. He and Parker stir up pulsating vortices of powerfully rhythmic melodies, which roar disconcertingly like unsuspected tube trains, yet break down into bright, precise, fastidiously focused components.

BARRY WITHERDEN

Sweethearts In A Drugstore
Second Edition

NINTH WORLD MUSIC NWM021 CD

The curious name is attached to one of the most beautifully balanced free improvising groups currently at work in Europe. Its convenor, PO Jørgens, is a Danish drummer and percussionist who has collaborated with the likes of Evan Parker, Peter Brotzmann and Mats Gustafsson. Fellow Dane Peter Friis Nielsen, a member of Ghost In The Machine, plays electric bass, with Phil Durrant on violin, Pat Thomas on keyboards and Johannes Bauer on trombone.

The group's first album, recorded live in Copenhagen in 1996, featured another keyboard player, free jazz veteran Alan Silva. On *Second Edition*, recorded in the same city last year, he is replaced by trumpeter Axel Dorner. The studio sound is more intimate, less reverberant, casting sharper light on the group's intricately woven tapestries. Each of the nine pieces is a richly detailed continuum, a model of animated cohesion.

Dorner is a looming figure to incorporate in any unit, especially one so tightly knit. That he doesn't obtrude is testimony to his musical tact. Durrant and Thomas, as might be expected, additionally deploy electronics to punctuate, enhance, and help bind the ensemble sound. Friis Nielsen's contribution is dampened, popping and thudding, a chunky thread. Jørgens bobs and weaves, using his augmented kit to vary texture and shade and to add finely judged touches of colour. This is music with roots deep in a now venerable European tradition of collective improvisation but there's not a hint of wellworn formulas being repeated or cliches being re-run.

JULIAN COWLEY

Uusitalo
Vapaa Muurari Live

FORCE INC FIM044 CD

This latest Vladislav Delay project builds on the possibilities sketched out last year by his first releases which, along with those from Substance and Fluxion, suggested a possible line of flight from the formalist, self-referential endgame faced by the Chain Reaction label. Without losing the spatialisation of sound that is one of that label's key strengths, *Vapaa Muurari*'s overhaul of the genre seems fairly complete, as dark, drifting Techno abstraction has been transformed into deep House atmospherics. This album is the bridge between his earlier work and the recent, brilliant *Vocalcity*, featuring the deep House vocal tracks he recorded as Luomo.

Mixed live for CD release, the original four tracks have been subdivided into three or four tracks apiece. Seeping into each other like a narrative of lingering memories, the tracks ebb and flow without any breaks. 'Bring The Voodoo Down" features exquisitely detailed percussion layered with delay, effects and snatches of slap bass over the backbone of a solid funk bassline. This dissolves into "Social Children", an Ambient *Paris, Texas* style monologue of loss and remembrance which indiscernibly builds into the dub House miasma of "Big Hearts Come Later'. Elsewhere, "Social Selection" uses Delay's signature pops, crackles and dub effects laid over a pulsing bassline and slow House rhythm — a feelgood groove conjuring up all the melancholy of the realisation that promises of utopia can only ever be fantasies, whether in House music or politics.

BEN BORTHWICK

Fartein Valen
The Eternal

RUNE GRAMMOFON R2013 CD

Fartein Valen (1887-1952) was one of the few significant composers working in Norway between Edvard Grieg and Arne Nordheim, but his music remains little known. Apparently he suffered from being thought 'difficult' by contemporaries, perhaps because of his polyphonic applications of the 12 tone method. Given the emotional directness of the pieces collected on *The Eternal*, it may have been buttoned-up conservative reserve which formed the real obstacle.

This is the work of a younger contemporary of Edvard Munch, and it has some affinity with that painter's symbolic expressiveness although Valen's distortions are more muted, his palette softer. His use of dissonance is anguished rather than grating. It's a music of dissolving aspirations and fading hopes of failure to reach an absolute that has been intuited yet lies beyond human reach. Titles such as *The Churchyard By The Sea* and *Ode To Solitude* give some sense of the pieces, which are remarkably consistent in mood. In Valen's orchestral works, performed here by The Oslo Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic and Trondheim Symphony Orchestras, melancholy brass and woodwind shrink towards the mournful lower depths, while strings clutch at the upper register in a desperate effort to clamber towards remote regions of glacial silence.

His *Symphony No 1* and *Violin Concerto* are included but sparer, more concentrated compositions, such as the solo piano piece *Nachtstuck* (1935), bear Valen's signature just as clearly. It's a brooding work, depicting the waning of the day's light, and tinged with nocturnal self-doubt. If you are not easily seduced by yearning, this CD will seem relentless to the point of neurosis. If there's room in your life for contemplation of the sublime, however, Valen has prepared the soundtrack.

JULIAN COWLEY

Various Artists
American Breakbeat (Electronic Music From USA And Canada)

KLANGKRIEG KK02 2XCD

Various Artists
Across The Cell Wall (A Visualisation Of Miniaturisation)

KODAMA 13 CD

The continuing ascent and proliferation of Laptop Man is further documented by this pair of faintly superfluous compilations hailing from German and Canadian labels respectively. That there are so many bedroom composers ascetically devoting their creative energy to the cult of the latter day saints of the glitch (Brinkmann, Oval, Basic Channel, *et al*) is worthy of note in itself: something in this music — tentative, austere, oblique and wilfully precise as it is — must have an arcane resonance for our generation. Although it's often tempting to suggest that the audience for this sound is not much larger than the total number of people making it, it's only fair to observe that, in its mute, almost autistic fragility, there's a definitive expression of (and route away from) the profound alienation ushered into being by the triumph of consumer capitalism. These arid, attenuated, shifting surfaces are redolent of the emotional frostbite brought on by ceaseless sensory stimulation.

But for the uninitiated, the rewards are few and far between. I nearly cried when track six of *Across The Cell Wall* (by Richard Devine) deigned to admit a breath of tonal colour which carried with it the album's first shadowy suggestion of melody. Coming after nearly half an hour of unobtrusive digital scratches, tinny whirrs and greyscale drone, this tiny flowering of warmth had the emotional impact of the finale of Sibelius's *Fifth Symphony*. Which I guess is an achievement, of sorts. All of these tracks were crafted in response to a biological idea: each contributor was invited to imagine himself (nope, no women) as a molecule moving through a cell wall, but a less organic collection of sound would be hard to imagine. The likes of Jake Mandell, Kid606 and Kevin Blechdom rather opt to generate nebulae of atomised digitalia, letting them follow quixotic slo-motion Brownian patterns.

Although some of the same names appear on the ill-titled *American Breakbeat* (there's not much 'Ardkore in here, 'broken beat' would be more appropriate), the double CD collection is more catholic, if not much more approachable. High points are Alejandra & Underwood's daring and fissured study in caesura, and Matmos's bristling and colourful motorik burst. But overall, those already familiar with the work of Kit Clayton, David Kristian Mandell and Kid606 will know what to expect, while those awaiting the moment of illumination that will propel them into this sect are unlikely to find it here.

CHRIS SHARP

Various Artists
The Architecture Of The Incidental
GD STEREO GOO14 CD

Moving through space is a great theme for an electroacoustic compilation. This idea was central to Guy Debord's Situationist theory of the dérive, which the liner notes and an accompanying essay posit as the starting point for this CD's investigation of urban space and the everyday. However, the artists' attempts to close the gap between culture and everyday life is so literal that it somehow manages to evacuate the politically radical aspect of this theory, and treats it as an excuse for romanticised flanerie. Instead of creating an aural montage where 'the incidental' unveils information that is normally hidden by ideology, the results are either passive, uncritical, acoustic ethnography or the kind of formalist abstraction the Situationists railed against.

Fortunately, there are a couple of exceptions. Gen Ken Montgomery's subtle intervention into "Public Hearing" slowly transforms an exoticised field recording into processed signals and frequencies. In 'A Field Of Delineations Passing Through A System Of Coordinates" Brian Conley's subject is the sounds and rhythms of modalities of movement through space. He builds a heavily textured tableau that uses its subject as source material while simultaneously reflecting upon itself.

Would I be so full of bile if this didn't come packaged as a pseudo-critical project? Probably not, but by locating the project within a specific intellectual sphere they expose themselves to its critical values. Instead of being dedicated to the dérive, this CD should be an homage to the fleeting moments caught by the *en plein air* fantasies of soft focus impressionism.

BEN BORTHWICK

Iannis Xenakis
Persepolis
FRACTAL OX CD

One of very few 'classical' composers to imagine music as pressure systems rather than narratives, Iannis Xenakis found his ideal medium in the densities of noise he could squeeze onto tape. His electric oeuvre continues to pack a heavier punch than anything written for acoustic instruments, so this debut phonographic appearance of *Persepolis* is to welcomed with open arms. Created for the Iranian Shiraz Festival in 1971, the piece was performed on the site of the ancient palace of king Darius, but more than a concert, *Persepolis* was a festival of music and light — a kind of wonder of the world whose continual crescendoes and sustained intensities seem to signal some impending giant event — indeed, calling to mind the apocryphal tales of Babylon's priest-king caste, disseminating the civilisation's secrets via bardic songs on the temple steps.

The spectacle of *Persepolis* took place while Xenakis was in exile: his Greek homeland would not welcome him again until the political climate eased in 1974. But it came as Xenakis's utopianism reached fever pitch in the future-shocked post-lunar landing 1970s, entranced by the Apollo landings and the 'spaceship Earth' vision of Buckminster Fuller, Xenakis was wholeheartedly raising music-theatre's game on a scale that appears impossible grandiose, compared to the beetling, impoverished gestures of today's classical scene. You have only to look at the forces deployed: eight magnetic tapes diffused through 100 loudspeakers distributed amongst the ruins, fireworks, film projections and natural fire (torches), laser beams flashing on the entrances to tombs, a searchlight throwing "light trajectories", choirs of running children representing "active knowledge" and "perpetual questioning". The music/spectacle itself conjures a pathway picked out in flame, a mental map to understanding the ruins of this crumbled civilisation.

He had been experimenting with the synaesthesia of sound and light before this. In the first of his self styled *Polytopes* (1967), he created a net of 1200 lights in a Montréal pavilion whose currents rippled on and off in an echo of the currents he was sending through his orchestral forces, afterwards in the the late 70s he was at work on an enormous piece for perfomance in Mexico's pre-Columbian ruins, involving enormous choirs of local children, although this does not seem to have been completed. Printed bumph accompanying *Persepolis*'s performances tapped into Iran's location as possible 'cradle of civilization' the composer described it as "a rock tablet on which hieroglyphic or cuneiform messages are engraved in a compact, hermetic way delivering their secrets only to those who want and know how to read them. The listener must pay for his [sic] penetration into the knowledge of the signs with great effort, pain and the suffering of his own birth."

All of this is, thankfully, described in some detail in the sleevenotes, for the music heard in isolation would not necessarily evoke such thoughts of civilisation's distant past. A constant, tinny, nagging rattle underpins the piece's entire 56 minutes, like an eternally dragging chain. Although there's little light and shade variation, there are more lugubrious passages where minute details and gonglike reverberations can be heard emerging from the saturation of the piece's noise elements. There are several passages where the sonic deluge spikes into pressurised pinnacles: the sound of jet airliners or rocket engines hint at the pull of outer space — the destiny of the mathematical and scientific advances which were largely originated within the Mesopotamian river plains. Such contextualisation is crucial, trying to conjure up mind's eye visions of those swirling pinpoints of flight, and flaming torches held by Shiraz schoolboys racing down the mountain and disappeared into the nearby forests, you start to realise what an incredible, disarming and plain off-world experience Xenakis was aiming for.

ROB YOUNG

John Zorn
Xu Feng
TZAOIK TZ7329 CD

Xu Feng initiates a series documenting Zorn's 'game pieces', most of which were devised between 1977 and 1989 when Zorn was looking for a personal method of reconciling complex compositional formats with the flexibility and freedom expected from improvisatory situations. He claims he was "tying together loose strings left dangling" by the likes of Cage, Cardew, Stockhausen and Earle Brown. Well, someoody had to.

Though the kung fu connection may provide clues to *Xu Feng*, Zorn is reluctant to publish his rules, preferring to pass them on as an oral tradition through which he can influence and interact with chosen players, exerting personal control over realisations, yet accepting that unauthorised performances will occur. The intriguing issue is less the divergence between authorised and renegade performances, or between different official or unofficial performances, as the nature of the divergence. How different would these pieces sound if they were entirely improvised, or if the rules were tweaked? Regardless of procedural underpinnings, *Xu Feng* shares its jagged power, lightning reflexes and gimlet-eyed engagement of the listener with many of Zorn's other projects, not least Naked City, or even with the legendary Laswell/Brotzmann unit Last Exit.

I guess Zorn would agree that sonic ends not methodological means, is what matters. *Xu Feng* certainly sounds good, thanks to Chris Brown and David Slusser (electronics), Fred Frith and John Schott (guitars) and Dave Lombardo and William Winant (drums and percussion). The real potency of this music resides in the sense of their commitment to forging a cohering surge of sound from complex interlocking details which dart across the soundscape, spinning, stinging and sometimes bludgeoning the shadows of pre-ordained structures.

BARRY WITHERDEN

:zoviet*france:
The Decriminalisation Of Country Music
TRAMWAY TRAM1 CD

It is entirely appropriate that Newcastle's :zoviet*france: produced this album while working in Glasgow, where C&W has been enormously popular for decades, cutting through class, gender and age barriers alike. The optimistic fatalism of the basslines and slide guitar make it difficult not to recall movie soundtracks, particularly Ry Cooder's *Paris Texas*, while the amazing production and lusciousness of the sparse repetitions and loops bring to mind Steve Reich's *Music For 18 Musicians*. These genres are pushed together in an unlikely combination that creates a perfectly balanced sound over nine tracks, three of them lasting nine minutes or more.

The Decriminalisation Of Country Music is such a seductively introspective album that it would be easy to overlook the way it resonates far beyond the exquisite fusion of drones and slide guitar. Commissioned by the Tramway arts centre, each track is built around a series of documentary recordings made during a major redevelopment programme. "Something Spooked The Horses" refers to the building's status as a former tram yard. Its broader industrial genealogy is hinted at with deft subtlety by :zoviet*france:'s trademark drones. These float beneath a melancholy guitar like the phantom sirens of industrial production, resonating in a space still unaccustomed to such quietness. Instead of documenting the building process, the CD marks the interstitial moments of peace during the period of transition. Occasional bangs and clangs of workmen are so far away they chime with precision, while the smallest details skitter around in the foreground. By mapping the sounds of manual labour onto a broader context, these site recordings effectively echo the historical trajectory of Glasgow's public image as well as the building's changed status within the city's unconscious.

BEN BORTHWICK

the boomerang special

Ben Watson revisits some lost tablets of free Improv in Atavistic's **Unheard Music Series**

In the latest batch of releases in its Unheard Music Series offshoot, has American label Atavistic really retrieved some forgotten gems of European free improvisation? Here's hoping. The label certainly scores highly with **Nachtluft**. This Swiss trio — Andres Bosshard on cassettes, Gunter Muller on electronic percussion, zither and drum machine, and Jacques Widmer on percussion — cut a great album in June 1986, *Belle-View I-IV* (Atavistic UMS/ALP208 CD). As Jim O'Rourke points out in the booklet, the group knew how to use space, creating a dramatic music of reverberant crashes. When he played at Company Week in 1989, Bosshard used referential sources, and found his tape manipulation wasn't speedy enough for free playing. Here it's all brutally preplanned and abstract, and not an irony in earshot.

Describing a musician as "demented" could mean he's as wonderfully out as 60s Pharoah Sanders. However, on **John Tchicai & Irène Schweizer**'s *Willi The Pig* (UMS/ALP210), South African drummer Makaya Ntshoko's dementia doesn't work. Bassist Buschi Niebergall — highly inventive when working with Han Bennink — cannot find spaces to make himself heard. Having played on *Ascension* in 1965, John Tchicai was busy translating Coltrane's late call to the spirits to alto, and the smaller horn sounds harsh and ugly when blown in this way. Schweizer's strategy is to lay out tinkling expanses of dissonant piano. The 40 minute set (in two sections here due to being remastered off the vinyl) sounds like it might get serious 30 minutes in, but at the climax Tchicai repeats a lick like he's stumped for ideas, the bad PA (the album was recorded live at the Willisau Jazz Festival in 1975) making his screech particularly unpalatable. Festival gigs tend to be sloppy and overblown, confusing the sloppy and overblown with musical freedom seems to be a contemporary malaise. The fact that the reissuers call the original cover — a cut-out wild boar in dayglo pink on silver, a bad joke contributed by the festival organiser — 'lovely' adds to one's unease about Atavistic's aesthetic.

Leo Cuypers's *Heavy Days Are Here Again* (UMS ALP207 CD) has the pianist front an all-star quartet with Willem Breuker on saxophones and clarinet, Arjen Gorter on bass and Han Bennink on drums. It's the one album this reviewer already has on vinyl and one I've never liked. In fact, as the musicians pour bohemian sarcasm over tunes like "Happy Days" and "Greensleeves", the results are ghastly enough to put you off Dutch Improv for life. Breuker's finicky charts for



Nervous tics: Han Bennink

The Kollektief demonstrate a sharp musical intelligence; here he sounds like he's just rushing through an unwelcome date. Maybe Europeans need their own identity, but playing shambolic versions of cabaret and brass band music with this kind of disdain is no answer. In a transcribed interview, Cuypers tells us that "Alsdat de Olifantstand" means "the soft heel of an elephant tooth", a bogus ethnic instrument Han Bennink's brother would try to raise ministry of culture grants to play. That admirably conveys the record's cynical, careless attitude.

A relief, then, to turn to **Alexander Von Schlippenbach**'s *Hunting The Snake* (UMS/ALP213 CD). From the first note you sense the power and crackle of the mighty Peter Kowald/Paul Lovens rhythm section and the intelligence of Schlippenbach's piano. The quartet use the heroic, heated instant-time pioneered by Cecil Taylor, but there's sufficient personality from the players to burn off any hint of pastiche. It's great to hear Evan Parker in a rhythmic matrix that makes his snorts and squeaks part of collective struggle; in 1975 he was working on quavering between-note effects, but he hasn't yet launched off into circular-breath autism. In "Glen Feshie", there's a brilliant high-note duet between Parker and Kowald which takes the music into abstract timbralism (or maybe *Rosenkavalier*?). In "Moonbeef", Schlippenbach reaches inside the piano to twang the strings; not a gimmick, but a logical step in music that treats sounds as building blocks. The musicians seem as surprised as we are when their efforts are rewarded by alien spaces where notes hang suspended like twinkling stars. Kowald's arco talking bass and Lovens's singing saw are astonishing. This quartet gave the abstract music associated with Darmstadt composition and Cologne Radio electronics an unsurpassed eloquence.

Like *Hunting The Snake*, **Han Bennink**'s *Nerve Beat* (UMS/ALP206 CD) was recorded for broadcast on Radio Bremen. It must have been a fun 45 minutes, with Bennink engaging in brief spasms of hectic bash everything, whistle and didgeridoo blowing, and shouting like John Belushi's bebop samurai on *Saturday Night Live*. It's a lively display, but on his own Bennink hasn't the concentration to pull off anything major. Bennink's impatience is a fantastic spritzer to other improvisors served neat (however eccentric and lopsided some of his patterns are), there's just not that much to listen to. When Bennink squalls on a clarinet while drumming, his rhythms become simpler still. If Bennink really believed in this music he'd have released it on ICP, the label he runs with Misha Mengelberg (its restraint — 30 releases in 30 years — remains a model for any operation). Solo drum records can work (Andrew Cyrille's *What About?*, Paul Hession's *Big Soft Drumset* and that's it, actually), but they require deliberation and a drummer capable of polyphony. Musicians thinking of using Bennink's drum track to create their own version of Derek Bailey's *Post-Improvisation 1* should be warned that the concert hall recording is airy and distant.

Schlingerland/Dynamische Schwingungen (UMS/ALP212 CD) was originally issued by **Sven-Åke Johansson** on the drummer's own label "in an edition of several hundred with a lovely hand-printed cover". John Corbett informs us in the notes. Shame we get no hand-printed cover here, as Johansson's limited timbral palette and monotonous rhythm make for a truly boring listen. Eventless pummelling, who needs it?

It's interesting to speculate why Atavistic's reissue series is so uneven: masterpieces (Peter Brotzmann's *Nipples* — see *The Wire* 199) jostle with outright disasters. Releases by Emanem and Incus may not please everyone, but at least they issue strong examples of their artists' work. Could it be something to do with the American relationship to free improvisation? In the booklet to the Intakt CD *Lost To The City*, Thurston Moore talks of collecting 60s 70s and 80s free Improv releases "like an art collector collects art". Atavistic have a similar attitude. The paradox is that we're not getting the collectables we're getting copies: printing the inner labels of the original vinyl records on CD disc and box gives off a fetishistic aura. Enthusiasm about records is all very well, but the isolated consumer — something the live ethic of improvisation abhors — does develop pretty idiosyncratic attachments. Recall the warped history of European modernism provided by collectors Gertrude Stein and Peggy Guggenheim, and give Atavistic's selections a try before purchasing. ■

PHOTO: VALERIE WILMER

in brief avant rock

Reviewed by **Tom Ridge**

Add N To Fu(x)a Add N To Fu(x)a/And Another Thing! ROCKET GIRL RGIRL22 CD

Fuxa Fuxa 2000 ROCKET GIRL RGIRL24 CD

The collaboration between Add N To (X)'s Barry 7 and Fuxa auteur Randall Nieman isn't quite the anticipated stand-off between pop art terrorism and cosmic lounge music. In fact, "Add N To Fu(x)a" itself is a bit of an aural sedative a minimalist drone piece whose gearshifts and textural variations are subtle, if not very interesting. 'And Another Thing!" is better, with plenty of high volume drilling noises and queasy electronica making inroads into its lurching, seesaw rhythm. It could be a demented soundtrack to an obscure piece of animation. Detroit resident Nieman's own *Fuxa 2000* album was made during a visit to the UK, and makes use of various talents such as Sonic Boom and Piano Magic's Glen Johnson. Fuxa's music is essentially warm, a hazy wash of synthesizer with a fuzzy analogue heart matched to gently undulating rhythms. Despite its relative lack of experimental edge, the melodies and strong arrangements are persuasive. Sonic Boom contributes his familiar narcotic whisper to a cover of Suicide's "Girl", which sticks out like a sore thumb amid the less generic tracks making up this strong album.

Air Traffic Controllers Whisper Number PARALLELISM PAR008 CD

With new drummer Jon Steele (of State River Widening) on board, guitarist Gerard Cosloy presents his strongest collection to date of smouldering Improv rock. Steele's drumming is more ordered than that of his predecessor, producing an accompaniment of powerhouse fills and crunching rhythms for Cosloy's versatile but raw playing. The interplay between the 'live' improvising duo and real-time edits of themselves dropped into the performance is riveting. Cosloy's guitar forays are endlessly inventive, from hypnotic ragas to blistering freakouts while Steele's drumming more than rises to the occasion — a million miles away from the delicate shades of his previous group.

And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead Mistakes And Regrets DOMINO RUG114 CD

Taken from the *Madonna* album, this single neatly distils the essence of a group who, though not quite the rock 'n' roll saviours of media legend, still make a fair stab at the role. Here, No Wave aesthetics go head to head against delirious rock abandonment, as a rumbling bassline jacknifes into shithot guitar riffs and Keith Moon drum rolls. In other words, they're a shotgun marriage of artcore angularity and a gloriously ascending hysteria a big yelp out of, and back into the void.

Brian & Chris Vectors MEGALON MEG08 CD

Initially Brian And Chris are as glossily unengaging as the disc's cover montage of a computer interface and an expanse of water traversed by a road bridge. The first three quarters of *Vectors* is a blandly sophisticated mixture of brushed drums, programmed beats and keyboards. Then as the tracks drift lazily by, this 'Frisco-based quartet suddenly turn the guitars up to 11 and generally rock out in a bizarre tribute to The Allman Brothers. They confound things further by rounding off a puzzling set with the hardcore jazz-Prog of "Katzenjammer".

The Eternals The Eternals DE SOTO ET37 CD

With their dub-heavy basslines and Damon Locks's rapped verses, it's not surprising that this trio cites Sly & Robbie and Gil Scott-Heron among their influences. Once they've defined their terms, the album works remarkably well. Beginning with a slightly awkward skank rant complete with melodica they develop a satisfying set of loping bass-heavy melodies, sparse electronic textures and guitar.

Grandpa's Ghost Il Bacio UPLAND UP002 CD

When Neil Young took Sonic Youth on tour with Crazy Horse early in the 1990s far from broadening audience tastes, SY were met with indifference or hostility. What hope then for Grandpa's Ghost, an Illinois group operating without a safety net, whose wilfully drawn-out experimentation co-exists with the distorted guitars and lonesome whine of psychedelicised Country rock? There's something here to offend rockers and cultists alike too way out for the former, too trad for the latter. Actually it's a pretty brave album, allowing for a good 20 minutes of deeply fried material before the first actual song.

Ilse Lau Cie De Koe HAPPY ZLOTY 002 CD

This frantic splattering jazz-punk actually sounds strangely complacent. Clocking in at 70 minutes, with diminishing returns from its combination of strangulated saxophone, stuttering bass and drums and niggling bursts of atonal guitar, this deeply inward-looking music comes from a Bremen group lost in concentric circles of their own devising. Outwardly, Ilse Lau's agenda appears confrontational but its virtuosity swiftly descends into masturbatory self-regard.

Japancakes Down The Elements KINDERCORE KC037 CD

Based in Athens, Georgia, Eric Berg is the leader of the shifting musical collective Japancakes, which originally came together to create improvised drone-based music. This new mini-album is an initially diverting mixture of electronica, strings and live percussion where the poise of the strings contrasts with the more urgent demands of the rhythm. Sadly, it swiftly flatlines to a Krautrock-influenced monotony. "A W Sonic" sounds like a perpetual intro, followed by a ten minute comedown. By the time the title track rolls around Berg's wannabe cosmic navigation has turned into an endless stretch of motorik Muzak.

Joan Of Arc The Gap JAOE TREE JT1053 CD LP

With a song entitled "Me And America OR The United Colours Of The Gap" and another one namechecking Situationist Guy Debord, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Joan Of Arc are that increasingly rare American beast, a political outfit. If this is indeed the case, they've cloaked their politics in a mask of impenetrability. Perhaps the Debord reference is a clue, as this intriguing album's plethora of jumpcut edits and lyrical dead ends suggests a kind of aural detournement, wherein their acoustic-led music is jumbled up and re-contexualised by layer upon layer of studio tinkering.

The Lowdown Revolver II STRANGE ATTRACTORS AUDIO HOUSE SAAH001 CD

Recorded at Olympia's Dub Narcotic studios Santa Cruz's The Lowdown blast off with overdriven electronica and distorted beats that collapse into shambolic rhythms. Their music is a bold noise-fixated splatter of channelled hysteria sounding like a kindergarten Atari Teenage Riot. They display an abiding fondness for the full range of electronic/futunstic cliches here lots of robotic vocals and laboratory humour, a little of which goes a long way.

Motor Totemist Guild All America City INDEPENDENT INC IRO1552 CD

Composer James Grigsby's playfulness is much in evidence on this soundtrack to his own film script. These fragments are like soundtracks to dreams, some bordering on pastiche — *Psycho* strings for instance. His series of elaborate musical tics and small explosions eventually builds to an extended almost meditative piece consisting of brass and chants ("Amaterasu"). The penultimate track "Yamatonadeshiko" combines atonal orchestral instruments with sound collage. If these lengthier pieces establish distinctive identities, the scattershot remainder is difficult to meet on any but the vaguest of terms.

The Residents Roadworms EURO RALPH 02 CD

A studio documentation of the live arrangements of The Residents *Wormwood* album which the group toured in early 1999. It was recorded straight to 24 track with some overdubs added later. Since there is no routemap here at all, it would be easy to dismiss the overblown rock posturing as an embarrassing betrayal of their former achievements. To understand what's going on here, you'll need to go back to the original *Wormwood* album and immerse yourself in its retellings of the darker stories from the Old Testament to see whether The Residents have either lost the plot entirely or have executed a profound deconstruction. *(Phil England)*

Songs: Ohia Ghost Tropic SECRETLY CANADIAN SC40 CD

The albums Jason Molina makes as Songs Ohia draw inevitable comparisons with Will Oldham. Molina explores a similar emotional, lyrical and musical landscape, his bareboned guitar-led music evoking a blasted physical and psychic terrain. *Ghost Tropic* is less jarring than Oldham's Palace output, more of a piece, rather than the latter's sudden jolting moments of naked exposure. He establishes and maintains a mood (although not a very light one) throughout, reaching a peak with 'Not Just A Ghost's Heart" which glimmers with a gloomy potency.

33.3 Plays Music AESTHETICS AST16 CD

This is what happens when alt.rockers appropriate classical instruments. From Chicago 33.3 combine supple rhythms with a strangely undemonstrative delivery like a self-effacing Sea And Cake. They splash cello liberally all over these tracks in an attempt at chamber post-rock. Their very precise, sterile music is summarised by the neutrality of the album's cover photograph and the group's anonymous sleeve portraits.

Town And Country It All Has To Do With It THRILL JOCKEY THRILL088 CD

Apparently part of a loose trend towards all things contemplative and acoustic in Chicago, Town And Country play graceful, minimalist music with a certain decentred fluidity. Acoustic bass directs these pieces, followed by cello, vibes and harmonium or accordion. Shifts in speed and texture are carried out subtly, so as not to interrupt the music's central flow. Halfway through however, you're dying for something crude and unsubtle to happen. Town And Country suffer from terminal politeness, and their endless deliberations leave them sounding like not so much part of a new trend, as a different quality of tedium.

in brief classical

Reviewed by **Andy Hamilton**

Richard Barrett Opening Of The Mouth ABC CLASSICS 465268 CD

Opening Of The Mouth is an ancient Egyptian entombment rite, intended to restore the power of speech so that subjects could plead their case to the gods Premiered in 1997 Barrett's ambitious work professes to use the poetry of Paul Celan to cleanse the language of artistic utterance in the century of the Holocaust It formed an installation/ performance project in collaboration with British artist Richard Crow realised with The Elision Ensemble in Perth Western Australia In lesser hands this might read as pretentious rather than ambitious but Barrett's tortuous vocal lines and tremulous instrumental textures make for a work of real power and concentration Barrett himself is on live electronics, among other remarkable performances is Carl Rosman's portrayal of Charon the boatman on bass clarinet koto and Harding fiddle add folk-exotic colour

Earle Brown Earle Brown CRI AMERICAN MASTERS 851 CD

If Christian Wolff has been neglected Earle Brown is probably the least heard of the New York School so it's good to have this supplemented reissue of a 1974 LP of his early works Works should be used advisedly in the Cagean context of course *December 1952* for piano, Brown's most famous composition is "an activity rather than a piece by me because of the content being supplied by the musicians" It appears here in a famous version by David Tudor and also in a recent realisation with added electronics by postmodernist composer Michael Daugherty *Music For Violin, Cello And Piano* is an early serial piece, the spiky *Novara* for chamber ensemble performed by an excellent Dutch ensemble, is a mature masterpiece *Octet 1* for eight loudspeakers from 1953, is vibrant and colourful The 1974 recordings aren't quite state of the art, but the music's importance transcends such considerations A splendid survey

Peter Eötvös Chinese Opera/ Shadows/Steine KAIROS KAI001 2082 CD

Born 1944 in Transylvania, Peter Eotvos is a conductor/composer known for his association with Pierre Boulez and the Ensemble Intercontemporain Here he conducts Klangforum Wien in three of his own uncompromisingly modernist compositions Eotvos is capable of writing music of uninvolving dryness even Boulez himself couldn't lift *zeroPoints* in its recent Edinburgh Festival performance — but the works here are compelling The purely instrumental *Chinese Opera* approaches Xenakis-like astringency in its second 'scene', while *Shadows*, another soundscape composition in the form of a concerto for flute and clarinet, lingeringly disappears into shadowy silence in the concluding movement A fine disc from an increasingly impressive German label

Joane Hétu Seule Dans Les Chants AMBIANCES MAGNETIQUES AM077 CD

"Music-of-being a poetry of sound for an imaginary space" is how this release on the French-Canadian label is described Hetu's 'songs' are for voice or sax, or sometimes both "I am a sax player and a singer, I am not a sax player or a singer," she writes, and there's no attempt at virtuosity in the mostly plaintive sax playing though there is some overblowing and multiphonics Pieces for voice involve lip-sucking and kissing noises, laughing, retching coughing and screaming Very personal intriguing and hard to categorise

Maurice Ohana Douze Etudes D Interpretation Pour Piano HARMONIC H9354 CD

Maurice Ohana (1914-92) was an Andalusian of Jewish descent, born in French Morocco A sometime associate of Pierre Schaeffer he hewed a fiercely independent line, drawing on Debussy and Spanish composers as well as jazz and flamenco The piano studies approach those of Debussy and Ligeti in the 20th century canon The two sets, completed in 1981-2 and 1984-5, receive a magisterial interpretation here from Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, aided on percussion by Florent Jodelet Ohana's use of harmony is colouristic, and the non-metric rhythmic approach places the highest demands on the performer An important release

PQ Phan Banana Trumpet Games CRI 849 CD

Born in Saigon in 1962, Phan and his family were allowed to emigrate to the United States in 1982 Since then he has built a reputation as one of the most original composers questioning the Eurocentric bias of contemporary classical music for instance, using the 'neutral third', neither major nor minor, of Vietnamese music His colourful often bustling, sometimes plangent style is shown to excellent effect in the longest piece here, *Beyond The Mountains* for clarinet, violin cello and piano *Unexpected Desire* for violin, cello and piano refers to traditional North Vietnamese vocal styles An excellent survey of a composer whose work seems more convincing, perhaps because less grandiose in ambition, than the East meets West creations of Tan Dun

Roger Reynolds Coconino A Shattered Landscape/Visions/ Other Works AUVIDIS MONTAIGNE MO782083 2XCD

Reynolds born 1934 is an American composer championed here and elsewhere, by The Arditti Quartet. His music can be tough on first listen and the undomesticated modernism of *Coconino* inspired by the fragmented landscape of Northern Arizona, remains so Here the quartet often fragments into solos, duos and trios *Ariadne's Thread*, with an electronic commentary on the quartet, is less forbidding *Kokoro* grew out of the quartet *Visions*, and such are its virtuosic demands that it's often hard to believe there's only one violinist playing. Lucky is the composer who has such compelling advocacy

Josep Soler/Albert Sardà/ Miquel Roger Catalan Quartets METIER MSV92026 CD

The Kreutzer Quartet gives powerful performances in an intriguing programme of Catalan 'New Complexity' The sleevenotes argue that these quartets by later compatriots of Catalan composer Roberto Gerhard represent a distinctive aesthetic However, although they're at a tangent to the Austro-German tradition, they are at least as indebted to it as Gerhard was and there's less obvious folk influence The first quartet by Josep Soler, born 1935, and his two pupils Albert Sarda and Miquel Roger, offer mostly quite bleak music, with qualities of expressionist angst Sarda's quartet, at 13 minutes the briefest in a long programme, is especially acerbic and often grindingly dissonant Soler's *Quartet No 5*, however, marks a return to tonality in its gentle unfolding

Daniel Teruggi The Shining Space SARGASSO S28033 CD

Daniel Teruggi is director of the GRM in Paris, and creates his own 'acousmatic' music incorporating the sound of real instruments His compelling *Instants D'Hiver — Summer Band*, celebrating the bandoneon of his native Argentina, was reviewed in *The Wire* 171 Though none of the pieces here quite has the appeal of that charming tribute, this is a very rewarding survey of Teruggi's recent music *Images Symphoniques* mixes 'symphonic moments' and synthesized sounds, though without the textural unity and concentration of Parmegiani *Crystal Mirage* weaves together tape sounds and the avant garde pianism of Philip Mead

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The numbers here are the ASCII codes for a Wav file of PCM data @ 44 100khz mono which represents the shortest length PCM data file possible at this sample rate - 1 two byte integer - in this case set to +32767 To play this piece create a wav file containing these values In MsWORD create a file in .TXT format as xxx wav where xxx is the filename With Num Lock on each ascii code can be entered by holding the Alt key down and entering the full 4 digit code on the numeric keypad (release alt key after each code). 0000 cannot be entered so enter a suitable replacement character- e g * and when complete use the find/replace command to replace all * with ^0
(The piece lasts 1/44100 of a second)

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in brief dub

Reviewed by Steve Barker

Audio Active Spaced Dolls DREAM MACHINE HDCA10048 CD

Japanese dubheads Audio Active's last set *Return Of The Red I* (their first for Sony Japan) was a major disappointment — a rushed concept album dedicated to weed that never made much sense. With more time and the newly sharpened edge of their Dry & Heavy dub offshoot, this new set is of a different order. From the opening ten minute epic 'Cosmos -> Chaos", through a warm version of the old Ken Boothe Studio One classic "You Don't Know" arriving at a Japanese rap from Boss the MC (could be Welsh?) and the heavy pivot of "Basspace" with driving egoless bass from Doug Wimbish, this is the rare case where a deal with a major doesn't necessarily equal a stultifying outcome. The introduction of the Yokan Horns extends the appeal of the tunes while production, with contributions from Adrian Sherwood, maintains the inimitable AA sound.

Mike Brooks & Friends Just The Vibes 1976 1983 MOLL-SELEKTA 3 CD

Although never a musician or producer to grab any headlines, Mike Brooks has a quality of being in the right places at the right times. Following their excellent albums from Alton Ellis and Joseph Cotton (Jah Walton), the German label Moll-Selekta once more delivers a fine document of reggae revives. The 16 tracks are split between vocal and DJ versions with no dubs. Jah Lloyd, Cornell Campbell, Barry Brown, Don Carlos, Errol Dunkley and others are engineered by a galaxy of Jamaica's finest Tubby, Scientist, Jackie Mittoo, Lee Perry, Jammy etc. So it's a virtual roots hymnal all the way — stand out tracks include Brooks himself on the Black Ark-reminiscent dubs of "Changes and "Solid Ground".

Dub Syndicate Live At The Maritime Hall 281 RECORDS 2015 CD

The Maritime Hall is a San Francisco venue which has prided itself on presenting some of reggae's legends over the last few years — Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Gregory Isaacs, Yellowman — and making the concerts available on both audio and video from their Website. Dub Syndicate's show from a couple of years ago is a remarkably clean recording taken live from the mixing board. Unfortunately, it's lacking the magic fingers of Adrian Sherwood in the dubbing area, but retains all the samples and loops which characterised the typical Dub Syndicate show. Perhaps one for the few remaining completist On-U fans.

King Tubby & The Aggrovators Shalom Dub RHINO RNCD2110 CD

Possibly the first reissue for this album certainly on CD since it first appeared in the UK on the Klik label back in 1975. There were 16 tracks on that piece of vinyl then, all faithfully reproduced here now in a mix of well known rhythms such as "Move Out Of Babylon' and 'Natty Dreadlocks Inna Greenwich Farm", plus less known cuts which are sure to delight the searcher after true Tubby's versions. All of these tunes feature dubbed out vocals, the sweetest being the duos of Derek Morgan and the late Hortense Ellis. "Wonder Why (Dub)" was one of Tubby's favourites. In fact, it's all dub of a sublime and relaxed order, rather than the 'mash dem down' variety. One for the connoisseur of the finer things in dub.

Ras Michael & The Sons of Negus Rastafari Dub ROIR RUSR251 LP
Twilight Circus Dub Sound System Binshaker Dub M RECORDS 150 LP

A brief mention for these two albums, both re-released on vinyl. The Ras Michael set is one of his best, both wild and processional at the same time. Set amongst banks of undulating percussion and swathes of reverb keyboard, this album can be perfectly programmed with any Sun Ra from the early 70s. More contemporary is the release from Ryan Moore's Twilight Circus Dub Sound System which dates back to 1997, but a debut on 180gm virgin vinyl. Moore is receiving more and more attention due to ceaseless gigging and the energetic dedication with which he approaches a genre whose adherents can sometimes match Northern Soul fans for sheer snobbishness. *Binshaker Dub* is probably his strongest album to date and therefore the perfect place to start.

Pablo Moses Special Selection Anthology Part 1 KEEP ON KICKING 812112 CD

Summons is duly served that this volume is merely the first amongst six scheduled to document the majority of the output of this most neglected of reggae vocalists. Unfortunately there's a mix between the sublime — selections from the singer's elemental *Revolutionary Dream*, particularly "I Man A Grasshopper" — and the plainly dire — mostly the material recorded in the States which is West Coast style festival reggae at its most vapid. Advice here is to look out for any straight reissues of the aforementioned classic set and hold out for what volume six in the series *Dubbing To The Max*, may bring.

Lee Perry Enter The Ark ASCENSION AN023 CD

When judgment time comes, envisage a special ceremony for all those involved in the misappropriation of his work passing before the vengeful Hugh Rainford Perry. At least these Ascension releases from Australia look good and usually have a top selection of tunes. They falter this time, however, since the picks of this set, Flying Sensation's "Shoulder To The Wheel" and Keith's "Cost Of Living" both with dubs, are also to be located on the equally dubious *Lost Treasures Of The Ark*, a three CD Upsetter set on UK Orchid. It's a jungle out there.

Submission Replay — The Dub Remixes METEO METEO001 CD

Submission is a Berlin based live dub outfit who have worked the festivals across Europe with the addition of regular MCs Paul PM and Tikiman. Overall their sound is warmer and more inviting than the starkness of the Berlin sound, maybe closer to that championed at Vienna's Dub Club, on whose recent compilation they appeared. Remixers at work here include The Rootsman, Thomas Fehlmann, Sun Electric, @lien HiFi and most satisfyingly, Rechenzentrum. Whether by accident or design, the balance in the remix selection makes for a varied listening album which can be difficult to find on the remix racks these days. Worth checking.

Urban Dub Urban Dub DUBHEAD DBH0[illegible]

Another UK outfit who prefer to take the music out on the road rather than stick to the studio. Roop from Dubwise Records and DJ Clive Austen were blooded in the Conscious Sounds stable. With the presence of regular vocalist MTC, there is a preponderance of tunes with lyrics, which is unusual coming out of the instrumentally dominated UK roots scene. Saxophonist Marjorie Paris completes the line-up. The album has a strong start with the opening few efforts proving distinctive in both composition and production. But a 14 song set makes heavy demands on rigorous quality control — unfortunately missing here. Time will tell.

Various Artists Docking Sequence BSI Campaign Vol 1 BSI BSI015 CD
Pan American East Coast Bugs BSI BSI013 12"

The impact of the On-U spore spread by the collectives wandering across the USA, Europe and Asia ten or so years ago is now becoming evident. Much of the content of *Docking Sequence* can be traced to that source. More or less a 50/50 split between the new and old worlds, the temptation for UK ears is those tracks generated by American cousins rather than the material from Alpha & Omega, Rootsman, Black Faction and Jah Warrior, excellent though they uniformly turn out to be. Raz Mesinai comes on like Ornette Coleman at a 21st century Town Hall, while another BSI artist, Sound Secretion, manages a dub and HipHop fusion rather than clash. Closing track is "Anodyne" more dub art from DJ Spooky and available on a 12" vinyl picture disc with extra mixes.

Labradford's Mark Nelson re-emerges on the West Coat label BSI as Pan American with the *East Coast Bugs* 12" an exercise in how minimalist dub-Techno (contrasted with the almost always tedious Techno-dub) can be transported from Vienna or Berlin and reproduced almost note for note in Chicago, and then some. Unlike that city's golden period of House, this is music to something to submit, rather than dance to. Insect noises are much more attractive recorded rather than live.

Various Artists Hi Fidelity Dub Sessions — The Second Chapter GUIDANCE GDRC575 CD

The second set of dubwize selections from Rob K's genre busting Chicago label with tunes sourced from Vienna, the UK and USA. One would not have assumed that UK roots heavyweights such as Jah Warrior and Hughie Izachaar would fit so seamlessly into Guidance-style programming, but it works and it's irresistible, which goes to prove that ears can be cleansed more easily than hearts. Amongst others there are deep sweet cuts here from G-Corp, Dubphonic, Indian Ropeman, Tosca and DJ Spooky. This is a prelude to the label's deeper venture, *Guidance Presents Rootical Sounds*, which is set to break down more of those annoying dancehall barriers. Although altogether smoother, Guidance is doing the same job from a different direction for reggae and dub as the *100%* series from Soul Jazz.

Various Artists Studio One Rockers SOUL JAZZ SJR48 CD/LP

For a newcomer, the music of Studio One can prove difficult to approach. The first problem is the irregular supply or absence of product. More subtle issues arose with the suitability of the listening environment or selection of the introductory material for the musically impatient. This compilation places more obvious or popular rhythms next to those we need to know better. So we get Ernest Ranglin's "Surfin" next to Lennie Hibbert's heavenly vibes treatment of the jazz standard "Quiet Village", not only Horace Andy's bad boy warning "Skylarking" but also Jazzbo's elemental toast to the rhythm 'Crabwalking'. Shouldn't there be awards for this kind of stuff?

in brief electronica

Reviewed by **Ian Penman**

Electro Organic Sound System Roots Wreck Remix BLISS RECORDINGS BLISS004 CD

Back in the day everyone had a song about greasy ribs or flim-flam sauce or salt cod and cornbread but aside from The Meat Puppets and The Descendents I can't think of too many musicians who have made records about food since Thatcher and Reagan waged war on the senses (Shanks & Bigfoot's "Sweet Like Chocolate" doesn't count nor does Raekwon's "Ice Cream") So it comes as a great pleasure to find Boston-based Jake Trussell of the Toneburst Collective devoting half of this CD to tracks named after root vegetables The music could be seen as slightly outmoded as well fibrous Jungle (definitely not drum n bass) and post-Orb dub overlayed with grainy electronics but it's heartening to find an electronicat who knows textures other than just itchy-scratchy or warm and enveloping On the remix front Hrvatski's Night Vision mix of "Carrot" is a bit deficient in Vitamin A but makes up for it with an almost blissed out middle section of trebly dub *(Peter Shapiro)*

Beth Hirsch Life Is Mine STUDIO [illegible] CD

Like a flintier Moloko (no bad thing The Time Is Now' was a *great* summer 45) this here is a real, identifiable Song with vocalist Hirsch providing the sort of singular husk "Fever" so abjectly lacks Red Snapper head up the four-mix spread but for my romantic overdraft it's the Borngraber & Struver version that hits home they pinpoint the addictive chorus and make a beautiful clarifying breeze of the whole with gutbucket bass and samba swirl, and before it's over they even squeeze in what sounds like a theremin (!) break Cool in a good way

Mimi De Mars A Avril 2000 EP CROSS CRSS001 12

Rorschach clue one half of Mimi's sleeve is a band of lovely unguent purple and the music within somehow follows suite hard edged clickety frisk dub but wistful like birdsong or eyelashes in overdrive not boys at knitted brow play I'd risk the speculation that 'Mimi isn't a boy except I know nothing, beyond the EP's Japanese origin Reminiscent, at times of Thomas Leer circa 82 these six short tracks also sparkle like a new morning — the music's step (hesitant humble light) reaching out to embrace not snub you with some spurious notion of 'killer beats

Ovuca Onclements [illegible] CATI04 2•CD

Nothing puts a sense of whimsy in its place quite like numbers Stretched over two CDs and clocking in at more than two interminable hours the 71 tracks on *Onclements* roll out an already thin talent to the point of transparency Unfinished rhythmic sketches, half-formed musical ideas, frantic drumbreaks simplistic keyboards and daft vocal effects fight for rapidly diminishing space and attention No one deserves this kind of generosity On the rear display card for this gargantuan distraction Rephlex thoughtfully point out that home taping is both illegal and killing music Ovuca evidently intends to achieve the latter without resorting to the former

Primal Scream Acclrtr EP CREATION CRESCD333 CD

Sheer fuck-you perversity may be a good way to swansong Creation but it won't get the album track Accelerator" far, as a 45 Which is doubly mad, since slap in the Vesuvial centre of this three track CD is a GREAT jump-around track "I'm 5 Years Ahead Of My Time" No wait, come back!! know it sounds like the ultimate Primal Scream yelp of hubris but 1) it's a cover and 2) for once all the Primals elements come careening and cascading together in a palpable HIT a coke-shot metallic whiteout shimmy and crawl a dynarod swirl of dub bass/rimshot, burning guitars and amphetamine strut vocals They may only in reality be five years ahead of 1966, but that doesn't make this any less of a New York Dolls/MC5-ish outtake treat

Remington Super 60 All The Songs From Pling 2001 SHADO SUBO13 CD

Dedicated to the notion that there will still be green fields fresh air and sunshine in the future Christoffer Schou and his chums have laid down a breezy selection of breathy pop songs that have the space age nostalgia appeal of an old Atari games console Bright acoustic guitars Casio bleeps and tinny beats help raise the spirits but some very indifferent vocal performances quickly bring them crashing back to Earth Some people really shouldn't be let near the bossa nova button on a Hammond organ

Tosca Suzuki In Dub G STONE 012 CD

It's everyone back to ours, as Tosca's Richard Dorfmeister and Rupert Huber invite various artists to refashion material from their second album Suzuki into big sprawling slices of dub Though it opens with Burnt Friedman's rather stilted version of the title number things pick up with Alex Kid's slinky Dubphonic catwalk through Orozco" Thereafter the mood remains focused and relaxed to the end

Various Artists Constant Friction Collaborations 2 LO RECORDINGS LCO18 CD

Always ready to make friends and influence people Lo Recordings have issued *Constant Friction Collaborations 2* where Four Tet shake hands with Rothko over some gradually escalating beats Cylob and Mike Flowers point at each other and giggle BJ Cole and Luke Vibert try to bust things up with some swaggering 303 and some ugly electronics until Stereolab clubs together with Hairy Butter to restore some sort of order Other couples seen sneaking off to the spare bedroom include Void with Twisted Science Persona with Warn Defever, and Mondii getting all dreamy with Inap on "Gu9" Poor Addy Brik and Plaid just don't know which way to look *(Ken Hollings)*

Cristian Vogel Whipaspank EP NOVAMUTE NOMU78 CD

Skip the first two self-conscious takes on Whipaspank" from Cylob and Vogel himself and head straight for the vast mutating expanses of New York's Tube Jerk mix Sounding throughout its opening stages like the inside of an abandoned dumpster being hosed out, the piece is quickly overrun by incoherent android voices viral 303 patterns and the kind of deeply twisted soundscaping that just won't let go The stealthily encroaching thrust of Vogel's "A Nice Night In With BA Barrocker" comes across like an afterthought by comparison, although it's always encouraging to find someone who remembers *The A Team* with some affection

Yee-King SuperUser REPHLEX CAT10[illegible] CD

Let Yee King's "Werkit" be a lesson and a warning to us all if you're going to bitmap a track around a sample lifted from Kraftwerk's "Tanzmusik" at least make sure that you can handle the rudiments of rhythm with some degree of clarity Yee-King has his moments of conceptual daring most notably with "E20 Crunch" when it looks as if his ideas are about to enter a whole new ballpark but his failure to think through his beats ultimately defeats him Too much flailing around dissipates a lot of potentially great intellectual energy as occurs during "Sunshine" and Segmentation Fault" Silence and stillness are rhythms too after all

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in brief global

Reviewed by **Richard Henderson**

Africando All Stars Mandali
STERN'S AFRICA STW1092 CD
The story is most touching, and should happen to all of us: a teenaged salsa freak in West Africa grows up to become a famous producer who takes his favourite local vocalists to record with their heroes, the salsa session players of uptown Manhattan. The producer is, of course, Ibrahim Sylla: Senegal's answer to Phil Ramone and the records that he produces in session with members of The Fania All-Stars and other Latin notables have become the successful franchise known as Africando. On this latest instalment, the original trio of singers has been expanded to include Benin's Gnonnas Pedro and the Malian superstar Salif Keita. The latter never sounds truly at one with the band on the salsa-fied version of his "N'toman" but his ten colleagues in song more than compensate for his tentative delivery. Boncana Maiga's arrangements are all as sharp as the trouser crease on a sharkskin suit. The rasp in Koffi Olomide's voice recalls most poignantly the late great Pape Seck, a founding member of Africando and still much missed despite the new all-star cast.

Mang'anja, Cewa, Yao Southern And Central Malawi Nyasaland 1950, 57 58 SHARP WOOO PRODUCTIONS SWP013 CD
One among a new trio of reissued field recordings by the ur-chronicler of African music, Hugh Tracey. Songs from various tribes in the Maravi Kingdom are here accompanied by board zither (whose cascading sonorities would no doubt elude European musical notation) and likhuba drums, the latter sounding like the eruption of very large popcorn kernels in part the result of weighting the drum skin with melted rubber from running shoes. The breakneck tempos and fullthroated call and response vocals found throughout this region veer seemingly between exhilaration and panic. "Manyanda" the first movement of the mganda dance, is a marvel of untrammelled enthusiasm, over a martial drum tattoo a song extolling the dancers' merits gives way to massed kazoos playing what sound like Heavy Metal power chords.

Hussein El Masry & Narendra Bataju Between The Nile & The Ganges INSTITUT DU MONDE ARABE 321021 CD
It probably seemed like a good idea at the time: pairing the oud (the lute which is the 'sovereign' instrument of Arabic music) of Egypt's Hussein El Masry with Indian sitar as played by Narendra Bataju, should yield interesting results. The players though are of markedly different temperaments. El Masry's fiery fingerpicking seems a mismatch for Bataju's entirely more subdued playing. Perhaps this, in combination with two intonation systems of questionable compatibility, accounts for the two musicians tiptoeing around each other never truly uniting until the final 30 seconds of this single 53 minute performance. The hand percussion, also a hybrid of Indian and Egyptian hand drums, merely bobs along in time. An anti-climactic affair: out of character for this usually inspired series of releases.

P18 Urban Cuban HIGHER OCTAVE/WORLD HOW47005 CD
Of all the attempts thus far to fuse Latin rhythms with the sequenced pulse of electro Jungle and Trance, this berserk collage takes the prize. Fierce tribal stomps break down to echoed trumpet solos and thumb popped bass riffs, which promptly segue to a disembodied voice from a public address system backed by sighing strings. Children's voices shout over strummed cuatro riffs, all of which are toppled abruptly by another trumpet's spin echo and a mile-per-minute drum 'n' bass track, on top of which is piled a sound collage of spliced street noise. More than anything encountered in recent months, this is best played very loud, preferably at cat-spaying volume. An action packed ride from start to its downtempo chanson finale, this mutation of vernacular Cuban styles was reputedly made by members of Manu Chao. If Malcolm McLaren had decided to create a sequel to "Duck Rock" in a studio in Havana, it would sound like *Urban Cuban*.

Boina Riziki & Soubi Chamsi Na Mwesi DIZIM 4503 CD
Songs with guitar and harp arrangements from the Comoros Islands, an archipelago in the channel of Mozambique. Boina Riziki plays the gabusi, a lute whose origins can be traced to Yemen. High pitched wailing vocals also freight influence from the world of Islam, but the rapid shaker pulse and delicate harp textures of the ndzenze indicate the immediate proximity of Madagascar. Beyond considerations of musical provenance, there is much heart and dignity in these performances. Furious string arpeggios, tearing off on a tangent at a considerable remove from the song proper, are broken by a single sung note which floats over the proceedings. During these moments, the musicians seem to hit time's pause' button. In fact the accompaniment on "Kampanani" suggests a reversed tape, though the sound is the result of highly nuanced finger picking.

Various Artists Afro-American Folk Music From Tate And Panola Counties, Mississippi LIBRARY OF CONGRESS/ROUNDER SELECT 1896415 15 CD
The fife and drum music of the American Civil War era was still very much alive in the Deep South when these recordings were made. Alan Lomax transcribed some performances during 1942 with others taped in the late 60s and early 70s. There is little discernible difference in the music, save for the treble roll-off of the older tapes. Lomax, with characteristic prescience, managed to locate what was probably the most Africanised vernacular music in the US, as performed by the sharecroppers of two Mississippi counties. An especially lively group hammers out the tune "Old Dick Jones Is Dead And Gone" on washtub, cans, benches and a chair.. the results sound remarkably like the parade drums heard on adjacent tracks. The perfect bound book, slipcased alongside the disc contains copious notes on the lives and musical heritage of these rural singers. A brief but heartrending lullaby "Go To Sleepy Baby", completes this glimpse into a lost world.

Various Artists Buddhist Music Of Tianjin/Naxi Music From Lijiang NIMBUS NI7064/5 2XCD
Spacious recordings, as one might expect from Nimbus, of two forms of rural music which still flourish in China, despite the encroachments of media and pop music. The disc devoted to ritual Buddhist music from the northern provinces is filled with surprises, such as the fact of the music existing at all in modern post-Mao China. Kicking off with a spirited romp led by the guanzi (an oboe-like double reed) the Tianjin Buddhist Music Ensemble proceeds to deploy an array of instruments that Harry Partch would have no doubt found irresistible including yunluo 'cloud gongs' and the sheng, a 17-pipe free reed organ. Percussion resembling Japanese taiko drums is alive and well in the southern Yunnan province. If the naxi music disc is an accurate indication. Vocal lines are doubled with the bowed erhuang, with its unmistakable almost vocal timbre recalling epic Chinese costume dramas such as *Raise The Red Lantern*. A stately affair, the proceedings are leavened somewhat by the accelerando pace of two folksongs which conclude the survey of Lijiang's music.

Various Artists The Rough Guide To Bhangra WORLD MUSIC NETWORK RGNET1054 CD
What was once a Punjabi folk dance has now become yet another sound of the Empire striking back. This collection boasts many strengths, eclecticism not least among these. When bhangra was still a cassette-only genre in late 80s Britain no one could have guessed that it could absorb Trance drum 'n' bass and House rhythms, among others and still retain its root character. A notorious (and pitchshifted) soundbite from *Dirty Harry* provides a non sequitur jump-start for Bombay Talkie's "Chargiye" while sampled Bollywood film dialogue and cod-*Star Wars* pronunciations backed by synth pads lend spice to 'Boliyan" by Malkit Singh. One could be forgiven for assuming that bhangra began and ended with the group Alaap, technocrats need not apply as the group's assured delivery and melodic hooks require little more than percolating dholak drum and violin arabesques to start the party on track one.

Various Artists Vocal Music In Crete SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS SFW40437 CD
A reissued collection of rare recordings made in the late 70s on the Greek island of Crete, this set sheds light on the vocal genres called rizitika (songs sung mostly for weddings, christenings and religious occasions), mandinadhes (extemporaneous political commentary in song) and tabakhaniotika (an urban repertoire similar to Greek rembetika). Unfortunately, as is the case with so much music discussed on this page these traditions are fading as media and modernity remake the Cretan social fabric. Still, the muscular projection of the singers heard here will bring to mind the windowsill-rattling delivery of the Sardinian quartet Tenores Di Bitti. The connection between male character and the contemplation of death is an oft-visited motif, yet the mournful choruses are imbued with a life-affirming forte delivery. After several a cappella cuts the introduction of a strummed lauoto is most welcome, especially as it underscores the line *"When art governs life is easy"*.

The Wagogo Wagogo Songs/Tanzania OCORA C560135 CD
A fascinating compilation of tribal styles from Tanzania. The cuts representing masumbi (entertainment music) swing like Bob Wills without losing their contemplative centre. The sonic laminate of izeze (spike fiddle) and thumb piano threaded over a rolling rhythm, will be immediately familiar to those acquainted with Hukwe Zawose's *Chibite*. At the heart of this collection are vocal polyphonies of impossible density reminiscent of pygmy choral singing. Like the pygmies, the Wagogo have integrated music into all facets of their daily lives. Children are inculcated with the local repertoire early in life, their voices well integrated within the adult ensembles. Two examples of chipande song will convince listeners within seconds that they are capable of easing the pain of circumcision.

in brief hiphop

Reviewed by **Hua Hsu & Dave Tompkins**

Das Bo Turlich, Turlich (Sicher Dicker) YO MAMA'S RECORDING COMPANY YPS7031 12

From the German imprint Yo Mama's Recording Company comes Oas Bo, a member of Funf Sterne Oelux (Five Star Oeluxe), a crew out of Hamburg. Imagine if 2 Live Crew had flow and "Thro The O' wasn't born in the USA. Oas Bo is a more agile MC and there hasn't been German Miami Bass like this since MC AOE's "Bass Rock Express". With a furious booty cadence, the hook chants *"Bass! Bass!"* but sounds more like *"Boss! Boss!"*. Inspired by Luke's film exploits, the Oas Bo video tours Hamburg's red light district. *(DT)*

DJ Sushi The Lost Dub Plates HIP HOP SLAM HHS8018 12"

Born Yukio Utada in 1978, DJ Sushi vehemently refused the spotlight. Despite skills that won the respect of DJs Shadow, Rob Swift, Krush and Eddie Oef, Sushi shunned all competitions and media. Instead, he was a scratch iconoclast, damn near obsessed with his art. The echoey effects of "Invasion Of The Giant Crab Sandwich" and the taut electro-minimalism of his "Aum Shinri Kyo" rhythm track make you wonder what could have been. Sadly, this eight-song collection of demos and dubplate tracks comprises everything the world will likely ever experience of the reclusive DJ, who took his own life in 1999. *(HH)*

Madlib Madlib Remixes NO LABEL PROMO 12

Though weed is the weapon of choice for much of today's HipHop generation, there are still some outer space cats who prefer their medicine one cap and stem at a time. As legend goes, Madlib first met the dastardly Quasimoto (his demented, but genius, alter ego) in the company of Sun Ra and some magic mushrooms. This EP may be far more conventional than his Quas recordings, but you still have to wonder what sun Madlib revolves around. Matching an utterly bizarre array of a cappellas with his own deep crate soundscapes, everyone from Charizma to Noreaga gets the dusted make-over. Common's "Car Horn" is outfitted with the delicious, slurred keyboard drawl last heard on Gang Starr's "All 4 Tha Ca$h". Madlib's remix unleashes The Roots' "Don't See Us" from its original skittering tempo. Instead, a lazy kick and jazzy dressing provide the perfect background for Black Thought and co to stretch their rhymes out. Perhaps Madlib's greatest accomplishment here though is the way he gets the anaemic Cappadonna to sound exciting. Looping a slowed down "Slang Editorial" with a tight crunch of guitar, the 'Tascam Villain' resuscitates the Wu second teamer. *(HH)*

MOP Ante Up LOUD LR542112 12

At their live shows, MOP's Billy Danz and Lil Fame throw chairs and cover Foreigner songs. This Brownsville Brooklyn duo has been screaming about guns successfully for the past eight years and nobody could (nor can) hear anybody else making this kind of racket. 'Ante Up' is about coughing up your jewellery, and if MOP doesn't jump you then the horn section will. The hook goes *"Kidnap that fool!"* and Billy Danz spits *"I'm gonna do what I wanna/Quiet is kept"*. Right. Play this after Low. *(DT)*

Outkast Stankonia LAFACE/ARISTA 73008 [illegible] CD/LP

Outkast's fourth album, *Stankonia*, is hooked on pheromonics. 'Closet' is pronounced 'claw-zat' and there are so many shifty, elastic clauses (verbal and musical) you can't put a finger on 'em much less cover an ass that shakes from Funkadelic to Prince to booty Bass. George Clinton would just say, 'Smell their finger'. "Ms Jackson" is a personal apology to *"babies' mamas, mamas"*. Big Boi scraps for custody (*"grandchild is a baby not a paycheck"*), while Andre 3000 quotes 70s diva Donna McGee and mourns lost love and its effect on their child. "Ms Jackson"'s music runs just as deep: reverse snare with tracers, a wistful piano and a hook melody that summons "Strawberry Letter 23". On the pungently titled "Call Before I Come", the synthesizer sounds like Bernie Worrell speeding up Nena's "99 Luft Balloons". "We Love Deez Hoez" is regrettable save for Big Boi's line about the *"Herman Munster heels"* of Betty Big Shoez. 'Red Velvet' puts to (hell with the) rest the scat over syrup beat trend. *"Ball if you want to but do it wit some class G"* spits B Boi as he syllablends with minced electro patter. At ooly ooe minute 24, "?" is too busy to check its watch and time elongates with a rapid soul clap, weird cabin fever coo and the dopest half-full glass of water sample since Gang Starr's "2 Deep". Here, Ore syncs up to the polyrhythms. *"What can make a nigga maybe be a pimp simply 'cause he don't like love"*. On "Humble Mumble" a breakbeat and a Badu burst from the Hammond two-step and Andre flips the ballot. *"Too Democratic, Republic fuck it/We chicken nugget"*. Stanks for letting them be. *(DT)*

Various Artists Luv 'N Haight UBIQUITY LH[illegible]03b 12

Before founding Ubiquity Records, many of the staff worked at a small San Francisco record shop called The Groove Merchant. Unearthing platters rare and funky, The Groove Merchant was an early paradise for producers. DJs and groove enthusiasts. Since starting their successful label, Ubiquity has tried to keep it real for their digger demographic with the splendid *Luv 'N Haight* reissue series. This split 12" collects three of their most prized discoveries. Joe McPhee's "Shakey Jake" is 13 minutes of early 1970s jazz-funk sloppiness. Daddy Fat Sax McPhee trades solos with a slinky Rhodes and an ambitious guitar. On 'Fly In The Soup', the mysterious Earl Moseley charts an eclectic Afrobeat rhythm and blows his funky horn all over that mess. Rounding the affair off are African Roots Of Jazz, who obviously don't subscribe to the belief that all post-73 funk is disposable. "The Healer/Don't Break' capitalises on the technology available to them in 1981. A Moogy bassline reverbs clearly and stealthily below, and the production is astonishingly clear. *(HH)*

Wu-Tang Clan The W LOUD LR62193[illegible] LP

Go knock your head against a cinder block with joy. The Wu are back. Their 17th project since 93, much of *The W* feels like some unbathed, 'grit the blade in your teeth, grim and bare all arms' type shit. 'Hollow Bones" loops a double moan and vocal from Syl Johnson's "Is It Because I'm Black" and doesn't add a beat. Ghostface Killah, Raekwon and Inspectah Deck transport Syl's lament to the now. *"I'm f-f-f-ending to take those,"* craves Ghost, and his *'f-f-f's* remind us his *Supreme Clientele* saved the twinight. On "Jah World" Ghost is the marrowing truth. *"They touched our bodies in the strangest places"*. We need a cameo of Redman driving a Mr Softee ice cream truck ("Red Bull") to cheer us up. Junior Reid echoes across "One Blood" and a glint of string vanishes into a guitar stroking the last hour. Here, Masta Killah badgers all ye rat-faced moles and declares *"It's the return of the Invincible Toad"*. Elsewhere, Raekwon sports a red Gucci jumper while on shrooms. GZA freestyles over two minute tympani, and Method Man still sounds like a werewolf with cobwebs in his throat. *"In a room full of crackers I might cut the cheese"*. If "I Can't Sleep" doesn't move you, then you're a robot and you will be rusted by Ghost and RZA's crying style. The strings of "Walk On By" escalate. Ghost weeps *"babies with flies on they cheeks"* and Isaac Hayes scolds, *"Stop crying and be a man"*. On "Monument" Meth quotes Fat Larry's Band and advises *"Gotta check out tha W"*. Check please. *(DT)*



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in brief jazz

Reviewed by **David Keenan**

Ernest Dawkins's New Horizons Ensemble Jo Burg Jump DELMARK DE524 CD

A prime mover in today's AACM and therefore a real creative force in Chicago's musical community, Dawkins is an inspiring voice on both tenor and alto, with a soft hoarse tone that sounds like no one else. His New Horizons Ensemble, meanwhile, has been active since 1979, fluctuating between quintet and sextet (these days largely depending on guitarist Jeff Parker's pressing Chicago Underground and Tortoise commitments). Its sax/trumpet/trombone frontline straddles loose, free playing and big, brassy jazz. Parker only appears on one track here, but it's a beauty — "Shorter Suite", whose delicate slow motion poetry is as subliminally affecting as his work with Rob Mazurek *et al*. Hard to believe that this is the ensemble's first domestic US release — a further reminder of how little support the new music gets in its Chicago birthplace.

Kahil El'Zabar's Ritual Trio featuring Pharoah Sanders Africa N da Blues DELMARK DE519 CD

Pharoah Sanders's tone is absolutely unmistakable. From his first slow, honeyed notes it's immediately clear that he's on majestic form here. He's in inspiring company, percussionist Kahil El'Zabar's Ritual Trio boasts a masterful saxophonist in Ari Brown, a deep, thoughtful pianist (mostly the latter on this date) and the great bassist Malachi Favors, of The Art Ensemble Of Chicago. *Africa N'Da Blues* is another instalment in El'Zabar's continuing study of the music that warped his young teenage brain. A previous disc brought Archie Shepp on board for some raucous blasting, and this session is even better, a meditative, devotional set (despite Sanders letting rip with his patented split-tone throat gurgling), the highlight of which sees the saxophonists lock horns on a stunning take on Coltrane's "Miles Mode".

Denis Fournier Trio Chagarandah DEUX ZZZ84134 CD

Some nice guttural sax from Lionel Garcin combined with Fournier's slightly lopsided drumming and Bernard Santacruz's loping bass work, almost gives this disc the feel of a midget Arkestra. Leading off with a quote from Albert Ayler ("*We are the music we play And our commitment is to peace to understanding of life*"), it's pretty clear that *Chagarandah* is intended as a deep dive through territories mapped during the freedom drives of the late 60s. However, it is more sweetly nostalgic than blazing testimonial, with the trio moving through tight ensemble renditions of some satisfyingly meaty compositions. Nothing earthshaking but a pleasant breeze nonetheless.

Henriksen/Isungset/Seglem DAA NOR CD 0039 CD

Consisting of two horn players and a percussionist, this Norwegian trio tops off its booming triumphal brass with overblown ram's horns, psychedelic finger piano and droning tape loops. Gut-punching martial drums signal the entrance of distant choral voices, which rise like smoke spirals through the charged atmosphere, while somewhere above Henriksen and Seglem, alternating on trumpet, alto, tenor and horn, tangle like criss-crossing searchlight beams. Bloody and intense.

Carolyn Hume & Paul May Zero LEO LAB 066 CD

A very organic sounding piano/drums duo. Hume and May play through a series of compositions soaked in a drizzly, end of the pier melancholy. At points pianist Hume seems utterly lost in reverie, pausing over little melodic arches even as the drums keep things hopeful and optimistic, refusing to let the music sink into hopeless self-pity. At times, the intimate mood veers into bleak phantom landscapes, where complex chords and lone, held notes engage in an intense internal dialogue. Then May picks up the sticks, charging back over the horizon on rattling rimshots and flapping hi-hat, steeling the duo's resolve so they can move on.

Sven-Åke Johansson Six Little Pieces For Quintet HATOLOGY 538 CD

Swedish free percussionist Sven-Åke Johansson is probably best known for his brutal, late 60s encounters with saxophonist Peter Brotzmann's notorious vodka circle playing on high energy blowouts such as 1967's *For Adolphe Sax* and 68's *Machine Gun*. Yet outside of that little historical window, Johansson has played in a variety of different settings, and though *Six Little Pieces* is very much a look back to the birth of the free, it's not all firebreathing and cartwheels. Indeed, the quintet plays things fairly straight, complete with plenty of tagteam themes and solos. They seem more concerned with delineating the structural concerns of the early works of Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy *et al*, rather than matching them breath for breath. Indeed, Dolphy's benign ghost haunts the whole session, mostly thanks to the presence of young bass clarinettist Rudi Mahall, whose luminous tone burns every bit as softly as his mentor.

Bernd Konrad-Hans Koller Unit Phonolith HATOLOGY 520 CD

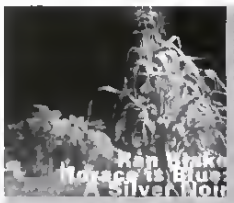
A phonolith is literally a soundstone thrown up and made solid by the furies of volcanic eruption. It works as a fairly good metaphor for the elemental approach of this fantastic German sextet, molten one on one interplay gives way to slashing, monolithic big band runs and eerie passages of smoky shadow. The first half of this CD originally came out in 1980 under the title *Traumtanzer*. This reissue couples it with a session from 1994 where Konrad and Koller square off for a Coltrane-reverent take on Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" and revisit the title track with an expanded nine piece orchestra now including Kenny Wheeler on trumpet. This is a thrilling recording full of impassioned, gut-wrenching feeling, flashy quicksilver technique and stop-on-a-penny dynamics all shot through with out of time fissures, loosing off little mantric note patterns and foghorn calls into the void. Konrad and Koller are both superb reedsmen, weaving tenor tones into snaking soprano lines, while violinist Didier Lockwood hits those screaming testimonial notes that are normally the sole preserve of the tenor.

Denman Maroney & Hans Tammen Billabong POTLATCH P100 CD

Denman Maroney specialises in prepared hyperpiano, piling the instrument's guts full of bars, bowls, knives, blocks and bells, while retaining a melodic, tuned-drum' approach. *Billabong* pairs him with Hans Tammen, a hapless, ham-fisted player who 'endangers' his guitar with all manner of comedic cartoon squeaks and burps. While Maroney squeezes nicely paced chordsteps from his piano, Tammen revs what sounds like an electric razor aimlessly up and down the fretboard, eventually moving on to something that appropriates the death throes of a cute cartoon character. It's all so idiotic that the duo almost works as a kind of surreal straight/funny man routine, where Maroney's inventive piano is humiliated into submission.

Olaf Rupp Life Science FMP 109 CD

Berlin guitarist Olaf Rupp wrestles a grungy electric and a meaty acoustic through a variety of stylistic approaches. Loose, stunted classical arpeggios, deadfinger dragging strums and hurricane runs along the neck all combine in what sounds like a damaged take on folk blues. The atmosphere is dramatic but never overblown, with tight, raging note stabs giving way to pools of silent reflection without ever sounding self-conscious. It feels like a liberated performance, a slow, egoless drift downstream, perfectly realised and preserved in real time.



The intense feeling that Ren Bieke brings to his interpretetions determines that each is concise, concentreted, gem-like, as intimate e statement as possible. Of course Bieke's is an utterly originel vision, and his dreme and intensity are obviously different from Horace Silver's passionate swing and romantic lyricism.



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What we have here is a one-nighter by the Steve Lacy Quartet at Paris' Sunset Club. ... The four members of the Quartet get a chance to stretch out and you can feel the club's energy clearly in the recording – it's a good night at the Sunset.

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Tommy McCook Toronto Dub (Bunjo)
Joe Gibbs & The Professionals No Bones For The Dogs (Town & Country)
The Ethiopian Eunuchs East African Herbs Vendor (The Thing)
Roy Dobson African Root (Black Pearl)
Drum Bago & The Rebel Group Inflation Version (London)
High Times Band Stand In Your Glory (High Times)
King Tubby's Travellers Under Heavy Manners (Travellers)
King Asher Crank Angle Pt 2 (Firehouse)
Shaggy Wonder Cough & Spit Out (Rythem Track)
Freddie McKay Dance Dis Ya Festival Version (Well Charge)
Mr Bojangles Fulfilment (Errol T)
Wailers & The SD Band Rudie Version (Studio One)
King Tubby's & The Aggrovators Zinc Fence (Daddy Kool)
I Roy Musical Air Raid Version (Chanan Jah)

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Johnny Cash American III Solitary Man (American)
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Susumu Yokota Sakura (Leaf)

Compiled by Clark Warner and Liz Copeland. Focus: Electronic. WDET-FM 101.9 (Detroit, USA), every second Wednesday of the month midnight-2am. www.wdetfm.org

The Office Ambience

Gary Lucas Level The Playing Field (Last Call)
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Various Emre (Dark Matter) (Source Research)
Various Disco Not Disco (Strut)

Compiled by The Wire Sound System

print run

New music books devoured, dissected, dissed



PHOTO IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS

Ambient centurion: Eno

The Ambient Century: From Mahler To Trance — The Evolution Of Sound In The Electronic Age

By Mark Prendergast

BLOOMSBURY PBK £20

Duck, folks. Eno's got a new theory. Evidently bored with Ambient's worldwide absorption into music industry routine, he's back at his pre-Roxy roots, Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra and the era of The Portsmouth Sinfonia. After two decades triumphantly radicalising how we hear — triumphantly ruining it, as some say — now he's gunning for the way we read.

How else to explain the foreword he's written endorsing Mark Prendergast's patently ridiculous book? Almost 500 laborious pages of attempted music history are introduced by a single tossed-off page of Eno guff: a nothing-new-to-say chore, puffing the written equivalent of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* — if *The Ring* had been conceived, composed and performed by 12 year old schoolchildren. And we're not talking Wunderkinder here, we're talking the kids who only do music to get out of games.

Maybe there should be an award for the book least likely to wow a *Wire* reader — *The Ambient Century* would walk it. As regards judicious choice of words, effective transmission of opinion, grasp of the implications of whatever argument and/or definition he's anywhere embarked on, memory of any argument and/or definition previously deployed, awareness of bathos as inadvertent rhetorical device, of absence of logic as in sentence connectives, Prendergast is a peerlessly clueless writer. The blurb sets the unintentionally hilarious tone: "Aided by electronics, new ideas and mass consumption, Ambient has established itself beyond question as the classical music of the future." No one at Bloomsbury wrote this cover copy, no one at Bloomsbury even scanned this vast dimwit digest prior to publication.

Eno-haters will naturally demand a more cynical explanation — for example, that celebs often cheer on also-rans in their own domain, since generosity towards second-rate rivals makes them look, well, generous, even as the comparison burnishes their own superiority. But Prendergast is no second-rate also-ran, he's far less able than that. Only those actively devoted to the downfall of Ambient could knowingly approve this rambling, dispiriting tome. But while it's easy to imagine some whiny academic Adorno wannabe claiming, at graceless length, that commodification has transformed all music into one huge, drifty

fluffy cloud thought-free soup of mboo-suppository meaninglessness, would such a figure really dare argue that Ambient's Retrospective Triumph Everywhere allows all music from Satie to Stockhausen to The Stones to Simon And Garfunkel to Santana to Sylvian to Scanner — to be described as if indistinguishable? This book does without the excuse either of unfamiliarity (Prendergast lists a lot of records) or hostility (he likes them all except Amon Duul II). This book likes its music descriptively indistinguishable.

If Prendergast is indeed a covert modernist, deep and devious, there's heroic self-effacement in how he assigns to himself the ignorance the foes of Ambient love to deem typical of its admirers. Arbitrarily studded with highly unreliable passages on the history of technology, the book's scope is hopelessly incomplete. Eno rhapsodises the movie soundtrack in his foreword: the book barely touches on it. Matters explored in (for example) Joseph Lanza's *Elevator Music* and Re/Search Publications' *Incredibly Strange Music I* and *II* are defiantly ignored. AMM and Nurse With Wound probably hate being called Ambient — but why Prendergast excludes them, and those like them, we never discover. Utter absence of reasoned argument is this book's strong point, you could say.

Still, clowns painted on velvet can be VERY scary. Thriftstore art, committed to and naively confident in its wonky worldview, can bounce back at you with uncanny force, challenging the tyranny of official expertise (this was exactly the power The Scratch Orchestra intended to tap). And Prendergast is very confident indeed about the relative worth of his path and, well, ours in 1997, in the first issue of *Altair5*, his one-man online Netzine, he described *The Wire* as "an organ which took about five years to catch up with my vision..."

This is a disonentatingly foolish book, and probably no one mentioned in it deserves the slight that inclusion implies — even Jean-Michel Jarre — but I can't help wondering if, by dint of Prendergast's idealism (music as bland, idea free utopia), his um, stylistic honesty (refusal to demur to mainstream standards) and his absolute literary and critical incompetence, a mask hasn't somehow been torn off some slouching beast somewhere. If its self-appointed historian blithely embraces everything about Ambient that its enemies despise — and its smarter proponents fear but deny — well, isn't this some kind of indictment? Those unhappy at Varèse's or Miles Davis's presence here may very rightly protest that, to fit the general bloodless profile, their bolshiness, their argument, their niggle, their history, their vividness, their intent, have been wilfully boiled away. But what made them boilable at all? Of course, there's another perspective. "By the last decade of the century it seemed that everything possible in electronic rock had been achieved. Then along came Enya with a new sound."

MARK SINKER

Mystery Train: Images Of America In Rock 'N' Roll Music; 25th Anniversary Edition

By Greil Marcus

FABER PBK £12.99

I first read *Mystery Train*, the book that wired rock journalism onto American mythology about a decade ago. It was in its revised third edition carrying a tagline from Clive James: "The most distinguished book yet to have been written about rock music." Marcus was already feeling the need then to distance himself from the 'heat' of the myths he had originally tried to find voices for — not that distance hasn't always been his bag. Performers had died or lost their musical footing, but it seemed Marcus could hang onto the book, the train could keep rolling, because rock music's past "continues to expand at a geometric rate". Marcus's return to the book now is not about shifting the insights with hindsight, but encrusting them with details and anecdotes and updates, like coral growing on a submerged hulk. As in the 80s, there are updates on the main protagonists (Levon Helm has opened his own Classic American Cafe in New Orleans) and on the songs, for instance: version number 10,001 of the Staggerlee ballad, this time from Nick Cave. "There seem to be no limits on how evil this song can become."

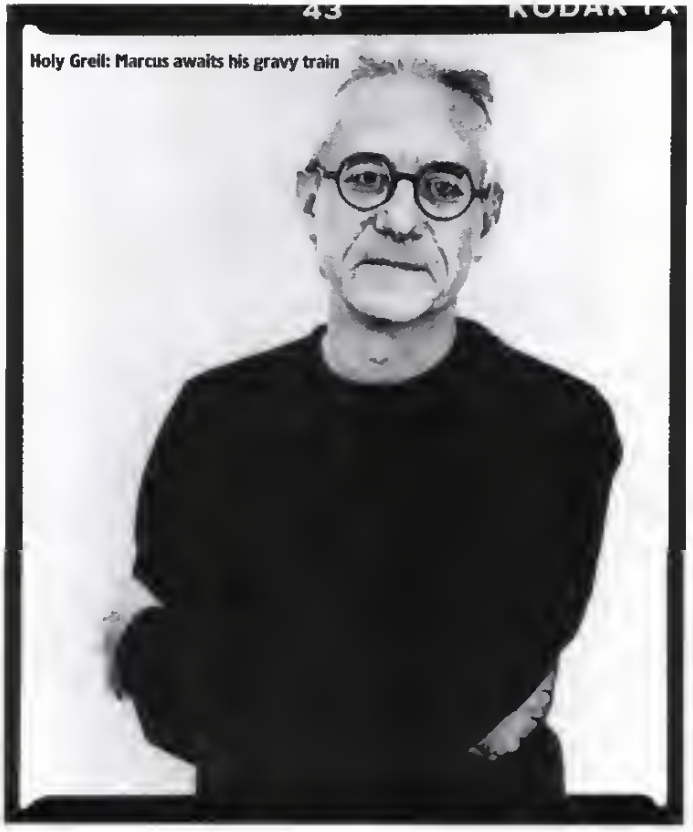
Reading the book then, I was struck first and foremost by its literariness. Here was a book about rock music that was constantly speaking in lofty tones. Marcus portrays himself as being incapable "of mulling over Elvis without thinking of Herman Melville". The chapter titles themselves splice rock groups and literary classics into ominous hybrids: "The Band: Pilgrims Progress". "Elvis Presliad". Harmonica Frank and Robert Johnson — the gargoyles at the entrance to Marcus's shrine of rock — are there "as metaphors more than musical influences". Was this Californian rock journalism or a New England seance?

Marcus's idea was that he was doing neither — this project was nothing less than a view into the enduring mythography of America. One of the new additions in the Notes section is a comment on Barney Hoskins's biography, *Across The Great Divide: The Band And America*: for Marcus, "it failed to say much about America". In contrast, his original introduction quoted academic Leslie Fiedler: "To be an American... is precisely to imagine a destiny rather than to inherit one." Marcus hoped that, by looking at the America emerging out of the songs of his 'symbolic Americans' such as Robbie Robertson and Randy Newman, "We might discover whose America we are living in at any one moment, and where it came from." More than passing glimpses of America's fantasy life, Marcus was plumbing something deeper: the unconscious figures of American liberal democracy — "We might even touch that spirit of place Americans have always sought."

Re-reading the book now, it is the ubiquitous anxieties over freedom and liberal guilt which, more than the literary, seem to power Marcus's forays into the music. The enlivening narrative of rock provided a kind of haunted respite from the threat of failure beneath the myth of freedom, as well as a tantalising repetition of the old myths. But weaving in and out of the tight and enthusiastic rock writing are the reflections of a guy whose degree was in American political thought. It's one thing to start a chapter on Randy Newman by comparing him with Raymond Chandler, it's another to then immediately slip into talking about Alexis De Tocqueville's *Democracy In America*. The closing lines of *Mystery Train* trumpet Walt Whitman's assertion that limits are undemocratic. "As good democrats we fight it out within the borders of his ambition."

On this front, *Mystery Train* is littered with brooding odes on the question of guilt and the relation with black culture. On Sly Stone's line *"Frightened faces to the wall"*, Marcus comments: "I think those faces up against the wall belonged to Black Panthers forced to strip naked on the night streets of Philadelphia." The introduction of 1974 suggests that the book was his way of responding to the political changes and anxieties of the time (1972-74), reflecting "moods of rage, excitement, loneliness, fatalism, desire". The pressure of that displacement comes through nowhere so much as in the central chapters on Stone and Randy Newman. Stone's story, for Marcus, is one of dazzling success — powerful musical invention, funk-spangled freedom and a model of democracy on stage — which then confronts the darkness of reality in *There's A Riot Goin' On* and "finds hell as advertised." But in Marcus's narrative this is merely the repetition of a timeless tale going back to the 1890s: the myth of Staggerlee, who shot Billy The Lion in an argument over a Stetson hat. Staggerlee is the story "that black America has never tired of hearing and never stopped living out". Really? Marcus finds Staggerlees everywhere, from *Superfly*'s Priest to Eldridge Cleaver and now OJ Simpson. By suggesting that black culture is trapped within the same timeless myth "buried deep in the heart", Marcus is in danger of colluding with stereotypers and essentialists. Wasn't being an American to imagine a destiny rather than inheriting one?

For Randy Newman the curse works in an opposite way. Marcus desperately wants to make more of the ironic ambivalence in Newman's music, but finds that ambivalence being drawn inexorably to pander to a white liberal audience. Newman was to be the subtle debunker of American myths: a more complacent hometown Zapoa, if criticism and complacency could possibly cohabit. Instead he turns out to be "too at home in the place to feel guilty about it", and songs such as "Short People" and "Yellow Man" are capped by 1974's *Good Old Boys*: a history of the South



Holy Greil: Marcus awaits his gravy train

PHOTO PAM ALEXANDER

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label lore

No: 049

Pickled Egg

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Distribution Cargo
Run by Nigel Turner
Roster includes Pop-Off Tuesday, Bablicon, Daniel Johnston, Big Eyes Volcano The Bear, Fanna, Gulliver, Marshmallow Coast, Le Bleu, The Evolution Control Committee
Brief history I started the label in 1997, fulfilling an ambition to "put something back into music" Landmark early releases include Japanese pop/noise collagists Pop-Off Tuesday's extraordinary debut LP and Daniel Johnston's first new record in more than four years (the "Dream Scream" 7") plus the European release of Ohio plunderphonics outfit The Evolution Control Committee's *Whipped Cream Mixes* (a collision of Herb Alpert instrumentals and Public Enemy raps) Then along came Bablicon, further cementing the label's reputation as a home for adventurous, non-conformist and creative new music Somehow I managed to get the European release of Daniel Johnston's new album, which, as a longtime fan, I consider a real coup
Statement of intent I would love to believe that the label's releases will some day merit at least a small footnote in musical history I hope Pickled Egg will even make a modest dent in the barriers of musical purism, and that the music media might one day share my vision Maybe I'm over-optimistic
Other activities The Pickled Egg Website aside, running a full time job to fund the label doesn't leave much time for other activities Even my own project, The Milk Of The Stars, has taken a backseat to the label
Future plans Albums from Le Bleu, Fanna, Big Eyes and Gulliver, followed by debuts from Brighton's 100 Pets and Manchester's One Second, One Second Plus doubles from Bablicon and Philadelphia space jazz ensemble Need New Body
Choice cuts Volcano The Bear *Yak Folks Y'Are*, Bablicon *In A Different City*

(Info and manifesto: Nigel Turner)

multi media

Chris Rose catches the British **Video Vibe** going round Europe

The tinted window of the mile-long stretch limo slides down to reveal Richard D James's sinister gurning face. He slides out of the car and breaks into an unlikely tap routine involving an umbrella that Gene Kelly wouldn't have been seen dead with, before morphing into a big-chested beauty, a grotesque horned beast, then back and forth again several times, along with the rest of the all-singing, all-dancing cast. The soundtrack to these grotesque mutations is, of course, Aphex Twin's screeching, warped breakbeat monster "Windowlicker". These images — at once comical, powerful and disturbing — form the defining moment of Video Vibe: Art, Music And Video In The UK, an exhibition currently touring Europe which examines the connections between video art and contemporary music, taking a broad historical sweep of the genre that includes Derek Jarman, Pierre et Gilles's work for Marc Almond, Anton Corbijn's monochrome camerawork for Depeche Mode and video works by Ross Sinclair, Georgina Starr and Angus Fairhurst, among many others.

Chris Cunningham's "Windowlicker" video (along with the equally disturbing "Come To Daddy", also included in the show) is both a parody of the MTV-style promo clip and rooted in experimental video work. The fact that Cunningham is now a video artist in his own right (his work *Flex* — with another Aphex Twin soundtrack — is included in the current Apocalypse exhibition of young British artists' at London's Royal Academy) underlines the dynamic running back and forth between sound and image, music and visual art.

Curated by the Rome based team of Cristiana Perrella and Daniela Cascella and supported by the British Council, Video Vibe begins by demonstrating how commercial music video has drawn inspiration from visual artists. "Music video is an interesting way of trying out new forms," says Perrella, "which then pass on into fine art or cinema." In commercial clips such as Pulp's "Help The Aged", artist John Currin brings to life one of his hyperreal portraits, while Yayoi Kusama fills Peter Gabriel's "Love Town" with her trademark psychedelic dots and spots. Damien Hirst (who shot a sheep-filled video for Blur's "Country House" single) points out in the catalogue to the show that he doesn't "see the difference" between music video, film and fine art. "To me it's all the same thing," he writes, before tellingly noting that the worst thing about making music videos is, "You can't change the soundtrack." Doug Aitken is another indefinable artist, pushing at the limits between fashion photography, video installations, short films, Web art, TV commercials and, of course, high profile music videos. His urgent rush of recycled 70s trash images for Fatboy Slim's "Rockafeller Skank", however, seems to be a case of the overexhaustion of the image: things that would have looked incredible ten years ago now barely raise an eyebrow.

The second part of Video Vibe investigates the other side of the dialogue: how contemporary music is influencing video art. Here the terrain is more fertile. Too much video art appears lost in a gallery context, so it's interesting here to see how that problem can be alleviated when video makers take music as the starting point, or at least as one of the main components of the work: it allows viewers to concentrate on the texture of what they are listening to/watching, rather than searching desperately for a narrative thread. In *Schwebebahn*, Darren Almond invents a new perspective on the German autobahn motonk sound, as the viewer is taken on a gentle upside down monorail ride with a hushed, ticking electro soundtrack. Sarah Miles's *Amaeru Fallout 1972* is somewhere between a short film and music video, looking at memory and displacement with the help of a spectral Polly Harvey, who pops up to sing "When Will I See You Again?" Richard Billingham goes lo-fi and videos his brother's hilarious 'dance' routine, chopping out speed with a credit card to the sound of his favourite song on the radio. Angus Fairhurst sends the whole thing up as he catches no-hope indie group Low Expectations stuck in an eternal loop. This is stuff that by nights should never get shown on MTV, yet knowing how even the most unreconstructed trash eventually transmutes into mainstream aesthetics, such images will probably surface there in some form or other in the future.

Of the many themes running through Video Vibe, one of the most powerful is the ghostly presence of Derek Jarman. The show opens with his palace-storming promo for The Smiths' "The Queen Is Dead", followed by a larger section dedicated to Throbbing Gristle, his ritualistic early 80s feature films made in conjunction with the group, *In The Shadow Of The Sun* and *TG Psychic Rally In Heaven*. Watching these videos now (the earliest, COUM Transmissions' *After Cease To Exist*, is nearly 25 years old) is an uncanny experience: fragments of a lost consciousness flickering, blurred, grainy images retrieved from some false memory syndrome flashback. You note the bad haircuts and home-made equipment, and vaguely remember that, yes, this is how things looked all that time ago, but you just hadn't remembered.

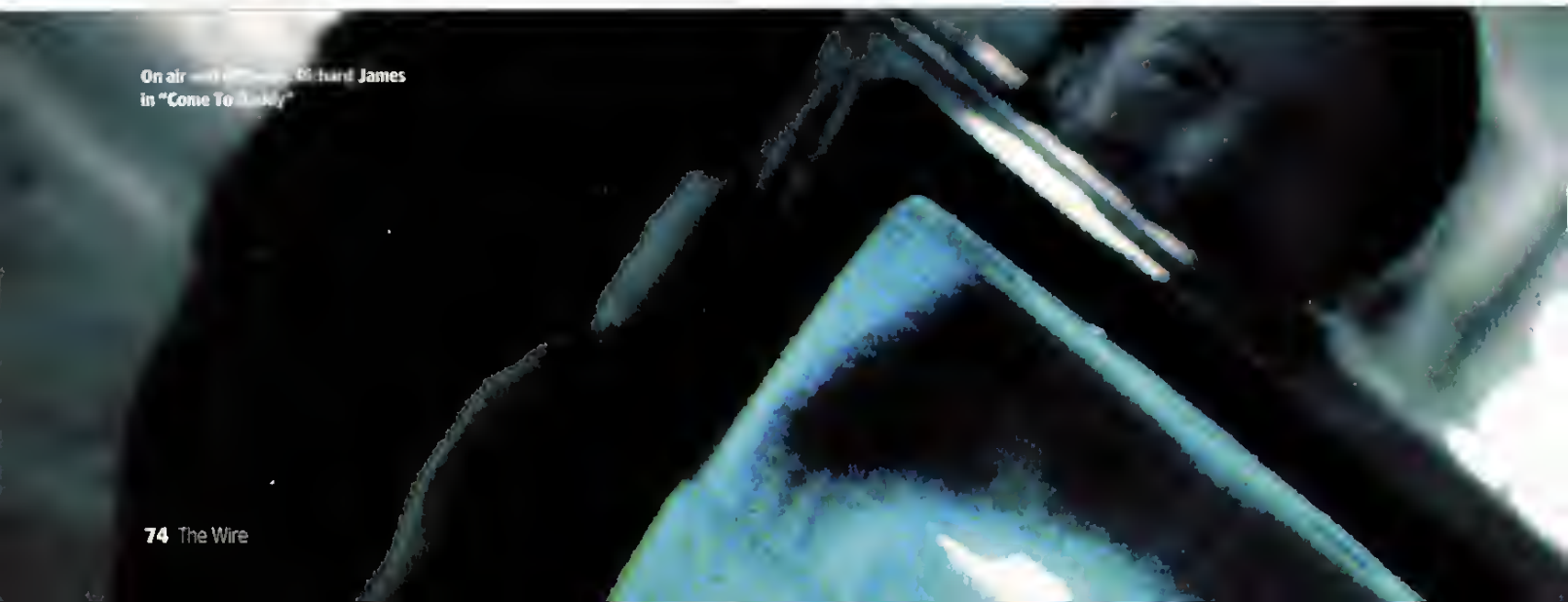
"Throbbing Gristle were selected for being somehow the 'fathers' of a certain way of making video, and for their strong connections to performance art," says Daniela Cascella (who is currently curating an installation by Ryoji Ikeda, Carsten Nicolai and Mika Vainio in Milan). "That time in music, along with its developments, is one of those I've always been more attracted to, and for sure one of the most creative and groundbreaking."

The next section of the show, borrowed from the archives of London's Lux Centre, focuses on London collective Scratch Video's mid-80s work, which arose out of the same DIY punk aesthetic which informed TG's productions. Video here provides the perfect medium for easy-to-assemble politically charged images, with the jump-cut juxtapositions prefiguring Coldcut and Hexstatic's current digital manipulations.

Another theme which runs through a number of the pieces is that of the gender slippage or transformation, a possibility offered by both film and music. John Maybury gives us a hyper-sexy Sinead O'Connor in his video for "You Do Something To Me", while Polly Harvey thinks about trying on a dress in Mana Mochnacz's "Man-Size". Then Edwin David drags up as Nico and lipsyncs to "All Tomorrow's Parties", before the show closes with six films about artist, performer, musician and fashion phenomenon Leigh Bowery.

Video Vibe (which has been to Rome, Milan and Naples and is presently on its way to Brussels) is accompanied by some intriguing monitor pieces. Mark Dean's bizarre yet strangely hypnotic *All The Time* (the words to Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" appear in heavy Gothic script, one at a time, slowed down to such a speed that it takes 12 hours to see all the way through) is, according to the artist, an attempt to "transform a fast-paced stream of Heavy Metal consciousness into a virtually endless silent meditation". Ross Sinclair's *Nirvana Unplugged in Amsterdam*, on the other hand (Sinclair sitting in his bedroom playing along to the record of the same name), is simply a good laugh.

For video artists, having more freedom, although less money, to experiment has uncovered a wealth of different relationships between visual images and recorded sound. Video Vibe shows how such relationships later turn up in unexpected places — you may yet see Throbbing Gristle on *The Chart Show*; you probably just won't recognise them. *Video Vibe is at Brussels Argos Arts until 12 December, then travels to Venice and Geneva during 2001.*



On air [illegible] Richard James in "Come To Daddy"

PHOTO COURTESY WARP RECORDS

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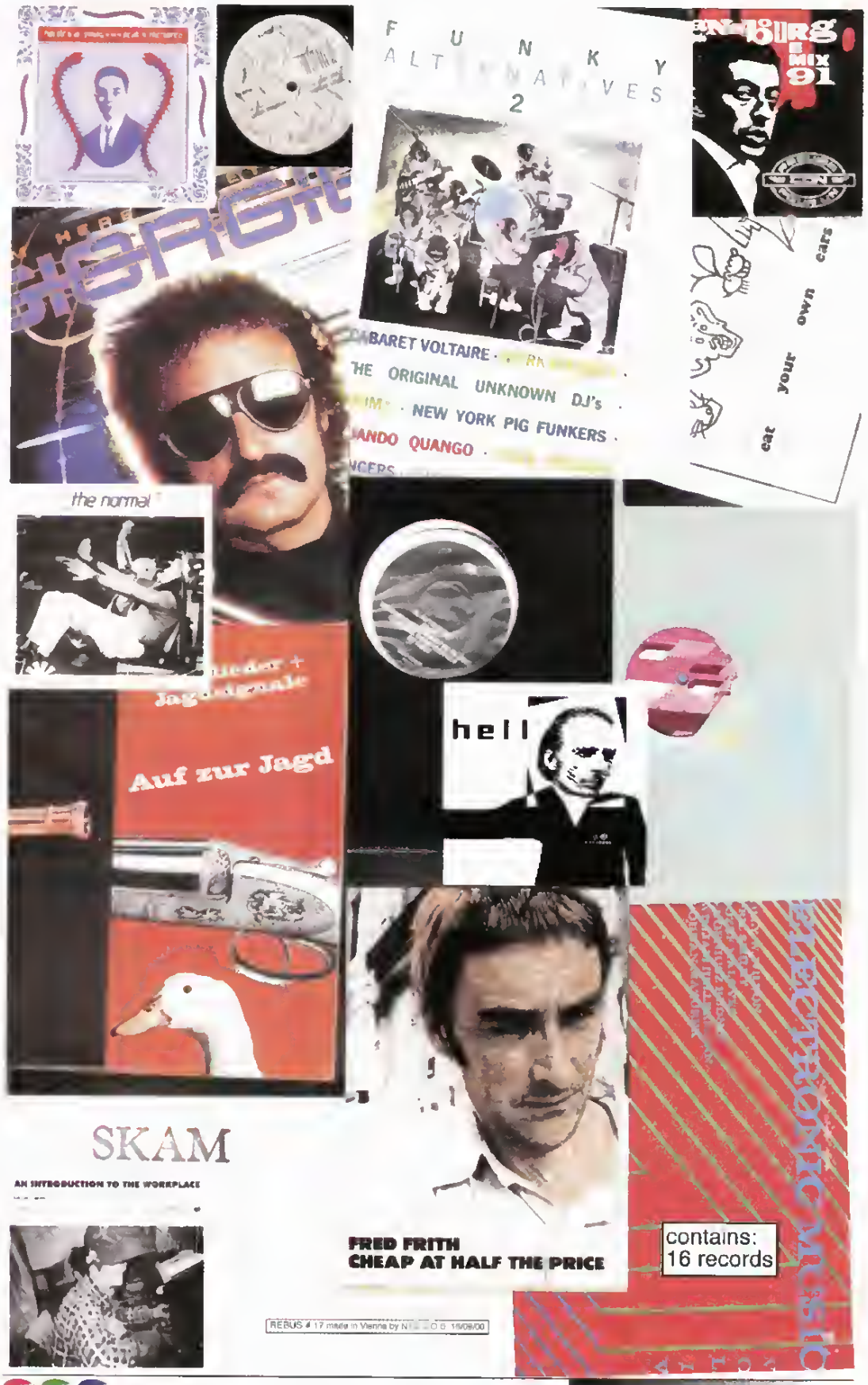
Brainchild of a syndicate that includes record labels (Touch and Ash International RIP), artists (People Like Us Paul Williams) a journalist from *Bizarre* magazine and an Internet retailer (Atrecordings.com), Minicomm promises to tread where no Net broadcaster has trodden before. The site coolly styled by Jon Wozencroft currently has four different sections. "Alpha-Mindjob" is undoubtedly the only time you'll hear Gen Halliwell side by side with Hilmar Orn Hilmarsson or Gabba with a touch of ragga minced up in a plunderphonic pate. Elsewhere, sonic curios are stored like the disturbing *Charlie — A Runaway Train*, in which a desperate train driver and station controller attempt to cope with impending disaster. Minicomm promise to add more material on a regular basis.



Dublab
www.dublab.com

"It's a vibe, not a format," say the Los Angeles collective behind this virtual venture, a grandiose description for what is essentially a Betalounge-style Net radio joint. The friendly, cheerful design loads up quickly and the audio streaming seems reliable. Tune in any time to hear resident DJs or browse an archive section which offers up a varied selection of audio snacks such as live sets by the likes of Chicago Underground Duo, Saul Williams, Anti-Pop Consortium, Juan Atkins and Nobukazu Takemura. And while you're online, Dublab features short reviews of albums, articles, an events listings section and a substantial links section. Join the 'Lab-rats today.

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on location

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Tablas and turntables over Tokyo: Talvin Singh and (inset) Pimlico Jeck

PHOTOS SATOSHI FUKUOKA

Adventures In Modern Music

Japan Tokyo And Osaka Clubs
Quattro

'How do you compete with this?' despaired the headline above a panorama of neon-splattered action architecture inside the British Council's internal newspaper illustrating a piece about promotion of UK creativity in Japan, where progress laps itself at increasing nanospeeds the instant response would be to pack up the office Ealing videos and withdraw to the republic of Pimlico Yet British cultural spores leave traces everywhere in Japan, if only on the mundane level of recurring punk, mod and beat booms Just as a wallsize Miles Davis image fronting a hairdressing salon in the farmlands of Northern Honshu says nothing about farmers listening habits such traces signify little more than consumer debris left behind when the Japanese economic bubble burst in the early 90s By then the hidden consortium of politico-cultural, business and media interests that stoked the rampant consumerism essential to its economic strategy had lost control of the insatiable appetites it had unleashed The mythical Japanese consensus taste has since shattered into millions of tiny interest groups Most remarkably when the bubble burst, it left the Tokyo technopolis intact to continue blitzkrieging consumers in an unending information war Inevitably, the global nervous systems connecting hitherto isolated cells of cultural resistance tracked by *The Wire* is locked into the same battle through its links with likeminded Japanese

Mutual interests produce strange

bedfellows, however, the British Council's invitation to *The Wire* to co-present concerts in Tokyo and Osaka arose out of a common desire to project (ostensibly) British music as the hub of some of the world's most vital undercurrents. Even so, the need to compete with Japan's blizzard of attractions dashed many a dream scenario before the co-conspirators settled on a remarkably coherent programme featuring Talvin Singh, Paul Schutze and Simon Hopkins and Philip Jeck. In addition, Kaoru Inoue (aka Chari Chan), turned in a knowledgeable pan-Pacific DJ set in Tokyo, and DJ Eye (aka The Boredoms' Yamatsuka Eye) layered contrasted and mixed Asian tones, beats and sparing splattertronics through stunningly composed seachanges before his hometown Osaka audience.

Each concert took place in a Club Quattro, a medium sized venue atop Parco buildings in Shibuya — Tokyo's hybrid of *Blade Runner* and Covent Garden — and merchant city Osaka's equivalent of Camden on a Sunday. Presenting outsider art above 'cutting edge' department stores is par for the course in Japan, where the forward-looking retail empires of the 70s engineered a compact between a raging, novelty-hungry economy and the avant garde.

Accompanied by his VJ Olivier Sorrentino and DJ Claas Sandbothe, Singh's performances engaged many of the concerns touched upon here. With his VJ rippling electronic communications lines through global images of urban chaos, Singh switched between solo tabla and his patented tablatronics variant, while his DJ jammed on trail-out grooves to something sounding like Kraftwerk's "Europe Endless". Just before their locked grooves, images and beats gridlocked, however, Singh's digits triggered the digital tablatronics keys that opened up an intriguing future for Euro-electronica's long-stalled man-machine. Yet, in the middle of an Indian classical tour, Singh himself was too exhausted to chase down the possibilities he was opening up. Indeed, in Osaka he largely abandoned their pursuit for a crowdpleasing Jungle and drum n' bass DJ set. Nevertheless, his patchy Tokyo performance was immensely thrilling for the directions it signposted.

If Japan's deregulated cities are the stuff of British town planners' nightmares, Tokyo and Osaka — where fantastic buildings sprout like bamboo that has been biofed acid and high octane speed — were dream locations for Paul Schutze. Accompanied by guitarist Hopkins, he based his improvisations here on music for the fourth site of his ongoing architecture series. Before a splitscreen backdrop of red and green-washed interiors from the African Museum in Brussels, he created Pacific and Polynesian polyrhythms from his CD-Rs, computer files and live vibraphone, which unlocked the museum's tragic narratives. His merging of non-European tones and rhythms tailed the tradewinds European empire builders pursued to Africa, the Far East and his Australian birthplace. With Hopkins's imaginatively wrought abrasives constituting the stress factors within the walls housing his narratives, Schutze's seemingly cool pieces unlocked a complex of troubling emotions, even as they sonically described and homaged the museum's architecture.

The video screens behind opening artist Philip Jeck more prosaically made visible the things he did to three dansette record players and minidisc recorder. His Tokyo performance was strong enough, but when one player and the minidisc machine crashed in Osaka, he resourcefully weathered these reverses to produce a phenomenally moving set. Looking bereft like his lover had just walked out on him, he rboe a simple scratch rhythm across a sea of heartbreak. Gaining in confidence the longer he stayed buoyant, he rediscovered his playfulness. When he tapped a Dansette's playing arm atop a hokey "Blue Moon" he wobbled the vocal to simultaneously melancholy and comic effect. The way he kept a rapt Osaka audience silently hanging onto his unamplified dictaphone as a finale was a measure of the music's passage from despair to rapture. A triumph of British ingenuity, if you like.

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Hub 3: Derek Bailey/ Richard Thomas/Jon Tye

UK, London Spitz

Hub #3 dangled the enticing prospect of bassist Tom Jenkinson, aka Squarepusher, 'duelling' with guitarist Derek Bailey, but as we entered the dark, warm, crowded space that is upstairs at the Spitz, a laser-printed sign taped to a table informed us that Jenkinson was indisposed due to food poisoning. Ever willing to improvise his way out of a situation, Derek Bailey agreed to play with the 'plus' contingent namely Richard Thomas on laptop and electronics, and Jon Tye on turntables. Maybe he should have turned tail and run. However, once you've fought your way through a Friday night Bishopsgate swarming with men in business suits and women in split skirts doing their best to erase a week's memories of capitalist endeavour by 'behaving badly' you need some kind of recompense, and Bailey/Thomas/Tye bravely tried to supply it.

The promised 'visual stimulation' was a projected video that collated materials available to the channel surfer, forced into semi-abstraction by polarising the colours and emphasising copy smears and streaks: space invaders, heart scanners, snowboarding, fighting termites, collapsing high-rise buildings, Thai dancers, parachutists, car headlights on wet Tarmac, trooping the colour, playing cards, mass Stalinist calisthenics. You're evidently not meant to think too much about what you're looking at, but such collections always seem to induce a state of ennui. The European prototypes of these cut 'n' mix freedoms — Hannah Hoch's collages, Guy Debord's films — made very particular points. Here, when the same scenes come round again you're left feeling jaded and cynical. Inevitably, such eyetracks — where the montagiste doesn't manage to outdo the thrill of the original — taint one's reception of the sonics (visual Improv seems to be an incredibly difficult project, one only Jerome Noetinger and Metamkine have so far cracked).

Derek Bailey tells tales about how Jamie Muir, the Improv percussion legend who somehow found his way into King Crimson, would make unpacking his kit part of a performance. Thankfully, Richard Thomas and Jon Tye don't make us sit through the hours it must take to plug together their myriad leads, but they did start with a stylish nonchalance that didn't distinguish testing and fiddling from performance. Their fitful bumps and clunks provided sonic clutter against which Bailey's guitar notes emerged as the inevitable line of argument. He was playing his f-hole semi-electric in the harsh non-volume-pedalled mboe he adopts when he reckons the general level is going to be loud. However, Thomas and Tye are not The Ruins or Tacuma/Weston after a while it became evident that the absolutely free improvised brief wasn't going to let their virtues shine. Bailey manfully grappled with any and every sonic grotesque T&T let fly, but they all kept breaking into shards where the disorder was banal rather than poignant. Loud bursts from Thomas and some ugly, muffled beats from Tye did eventually force Bailey into one of his brittle Metal solos, full of insane atonal arpeggios and angry, quacking peaks, but it was a long and taxing assault on Mount Sublime.

Audience and musicians all wanted some kind of transgenerational electricity to burn. The way Matt Wand and Pat Thomas booted new life into free improvisation in the early 90s shows that it thrives from contact with new ways of making noise. Tonight just wasn't the night. If anyone hadn't witnessed Bailey before and felt his avant stylings were hard to 'understand' it's because his whole instrumental approach is designed for dialogue. If it ain't happening, then there's not a lot to follow. Guitar fetishists can always find something to admire in a Bailey performance, but that kind of specialist regard has little to do with music, which knocks any fool over when it's really happening. The final indication that we were being treated to something inconsequential occurred when a Spitz messenger came onstage and whispered to Bailey he'd better stop. He laughed and brought things to a gentle close.



Wired for noise: Richard Thomas and Derek Bailey

PHOTO: JOHNNY VOLCANO

Downstairs bassist Miles Danso and his trio were chinking through the real music required for punters who aren't really there to listen Bailey played commercial gigs for ten years before he launched the good ship free improvisation Maybe today's avanteers should take note and postpone their insistence on dereferenced and atomised sonic art for some musical experiences at a more mundane level Given such practical groundwork (rather than the usual grant applications), their abstractions might finally evoke something more than the respectful tolerance and puzzlement they received at the Spitz

BEN WATSON



PHOTO ANDREW POTHECARY

Ornette Coleman Plays *Naked Lunch*

UK Belfast Waterfront Hall

Back in 1992 David Cronenberg filmed the unfilmable and committed William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* to celluloid His best idea was bringing Ornette Coleman onboard playing sax to music written by his regular soundtrack composer Howard Shore The mood of Cronenberg's films — seedy, visceral, dark a poetry of anxiety and disgust — owes much to Shore's distinctive scoring which combines rich orchestration with minor key melancholy and tonal disintegration a wrecked Wagner Burroughs was thrilled that Coleman was involved, and dropped by to witness the soundtrack sessions Scribbling his tender open key-ambiguous lines over the symphonic backing, Coleman was superb The CD (issued by Milan America/BMG) is a fantastic addition to Coleman's oeuvre, proof that his harmolodic concept can embrace and detourne Hollywood strings

Belfast is currently in danger of being left stranded by Dublin's IT boom Dubliners buy their second homes there (cynics say Irish unity will arrive via the cheque book, not the Armalite) In the 90s Glasgow refurbished its image by massive spending on the arts Hence the Belfast Festival sponsors include the Northern Ireland Tourist Board the National Lottery Fund Guinness, BT, Toyota and Ulster Bank Ornette Coleman was picked as the festival's 'artist in residence' Earlier on he and his trio (son Denardo on drums and bassist Charnett Moffett) performed with traditional Irish musicians (flutes, pipes fiddle and bodhran) Staging *Naked Lunch* — with projected film trio improvisation sound-mixing and a full orchestra — manages to combine expense avant cachet and spectacle London journalists were flown in wined and dined forget the bombs and shootings wake your readers up to the delights of this newly hip northern city

Into this weird conjuncture of music and politics steps Ornette Coleman, with his own weird global solution harmolodics His panculturalism refuses the strident triumphalism of say Mahavishnu or minimalism Instead it comes over cracked, wistful and scarily alien What was the word on the street about the harmolodics-meets-traditional gig? The owner of Dr Robert a secondhand record shop on Church Lane, said the collaboration hadn't quite worked A good try, but the three American musicians together were 'terrific It was nice to have Coleman in Belfast he continued but it wouldn't do any good for his part he's selling up and moving to Portugal As often, the international tentacles of alt.culture outflank politicians' concepts of indigenous virtue

Naked Lunch was performed at the Waterfront Hall, a vast circular auditorium opened in 1998 imposing itself hublike on the central streets The film was projected widescreen, with Coleman picked out by a spotlight when improvising The film's dialogue was played at full volume, with subtitles added whenever the music threatened to drown the words At 70 Coleman's alto saxophone is still transfixing, rowness and plea in every note Hearing Denardo's delirious drums next to symphony players was like seeing a Pop Art duck obliterate a varnished canvas, and Moffett's bass was heated and gorgeous The contrast of Coleman's piping sax with Shore's rich realtime strings and woodwinds promised a really special dialectic

However the film's narrative quickly took over, making the music almost irrelevant Though much of the script is pure Burroughs, Cronenberg tidies up *Naked Lunch*'s radical non-linearity He makes Burroughs's drug-fuelled sojourn in Algiers Interzone — a descent into Hell redeemed by transformation into a bestseller and consequent fame and fortune This underestimates the tenacity of Burroughs's exploration of the psychodynamics of capitalism and the limits of language Right at the end his *My Education A Book Of Dreams* was refusing 'literature' and instead interrogating the status of memory, fantasy and authority As if scared by the radical implications of cut-up and harmolodics, the film imposes conventional values with Burroughs, Kerouac and Ginsberg in the unlikely roles of all-American wannabes

A braver presentation would have mixed the film reels and played the dialogue backwards thus allowing the music to complement Cronenberg's beautifully gauche imagery on equal terms It's a truism that Hollywood flirts with radicalism and then disposes of it when the music is this profoundly and eloquently destabilising and a film pops up in the concert hall to tame it the recuperation becomes particularly graphic Particularly disappointing was the way Coleman's scalding sax lines were cast as horror effects, when actually they are shouts of joy and freedom The audience left exhilarated though mostly with Burroughs's wisecracks and obscenities But then who except a freak would talk about a *soundtrack* after a film?

On his *Tone Dialing* CD (1995) Ornette Coleman wrote 'Have you ever taken a trip to another country where you didn't know any of its citizens, and all you needed was a passport and a credit card? That simple gesture of confidence is what learning and growing is all about " Such a statement could only be made by an American, and a wealthy one at that Coleman's harmolodics are certainly a premonition of what a non-chauvinist, anti-hierarchical culture could be Without such visions, politics easily becomes unfelt, moralistic and drab However, while certain inequalities persist (ones exacerbated by the logic of profit driving many of the festival's sponsors), Coleman's vision is not going to be much more than a desperate if heartbreaking, cry and one that movie-watchers seem well equipped to ignore

BEN WATSON

Safety In Numbers Festival

USA New York various venues

Earlier this year, Montreal's MUTEK festival illustrated that North America could support an experimental electronic music event In New York, the SIN Fest, organised by the smallish distribution group Safety In Numbers, put the promise of MUTEK to the test by presenting some 40 performances by artists still largely unrecognised in the USA Coming a week after the industry standard CMJ conference, SIN felt more like an academic summit than a bacchanalian extravaganza Many of its acts hailed from the Intelligent Dance Music or IDM scene that bizarre world of pasty white boys initiated by Warp Records' *Artificial Intelligence* series

No surprise then, that SIN demonstrated the US experimental electronic scene's lack of performance experience Unlike MUTEK, it revealed its own inexperience by leaving it to the artists to call the shots on playing times, stage set-ups and other logistical details usually left to the promoters More positively, this atmosphere of freedom engendered a tense anticipation sweetly tinged with naivety Its unique balance was toppled in the chaos of the third night when the closure of one venue forced ten acts into a quaint bar no bigger than a king-sized toilet Even so the repeated technical mishaps plaguing the neophyte performers spawned an unexpected comradeship One of SIN's few veteran performers Dylan Jega Nathan, commented 'I remember this guy his tracks kept on crashing and he had to reboot his PowerMac and he'd get that little start-up bing! amped up on the PA Everyone cheered when they heard it! That could only happen at a festival like this '

Such cameraderie was also partly engendered by a set-up where labels like Merck Mad Monkey Isophlux and Oblq hosted shows that largely played to other musicians Instead of industry types touting martinis in one hand and faux remix deals in the other small huddles of lemming-like techies flooded from one set-up to the next, software plug-ins in hand ready to swap

Festivalgoers witnessed a broad range of styles currently preoccupying the electronica underground Phonem of Morr Music Multicast from Oblq and L Usine of Isophlux used largely percussion-heavy electronics albeit with a similar romantic touch of heavy synth melody that hallmarked early classics by Aphex Twin Autechre and Global Communication Noise and broken beat programming characterised Circumvent's Army Of The 23 Monkeys and Burning Rome Neutral's Nicole Elmer functioned as a bridge between many of these camps ranging from the processed electro of her first SIN set to the harsher Industrial aesthetics of her closing Planet showcase

That last night epitomised the best and worst in this rapidly changing wing of electronica One large stage was set up on the windswept Chelsea Pier overlooking New Jersey a second stage resided in the hull of a recovered tugboat called the Frying Pan, gutted to its bare metal essentials Ten acts ranging from the horrific, if static, squelching noise of Phthalocyanine to the glimmering guitar riffs of Capitol K came and went at 30 minute intervals, forcing guests to run back and forth between locations meaning they never really got a chance to soak up the music or atmosphere of either For all the brilliance of Mike Paradinas's closing Gabba set it got lost in the sheer diversity of acts on display

For all the festival's first-time mistakes, at least it was artist-led said Gabe Koch, of Miami's Merck records "A lot of them don't get to play at all normally " he concluded "I think a lot of them took away more confidence in their music "

HEATH K HIGNIGHT

BBC

Music Researcher

BBC Music Online

London

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live: Hefner (Inertia)
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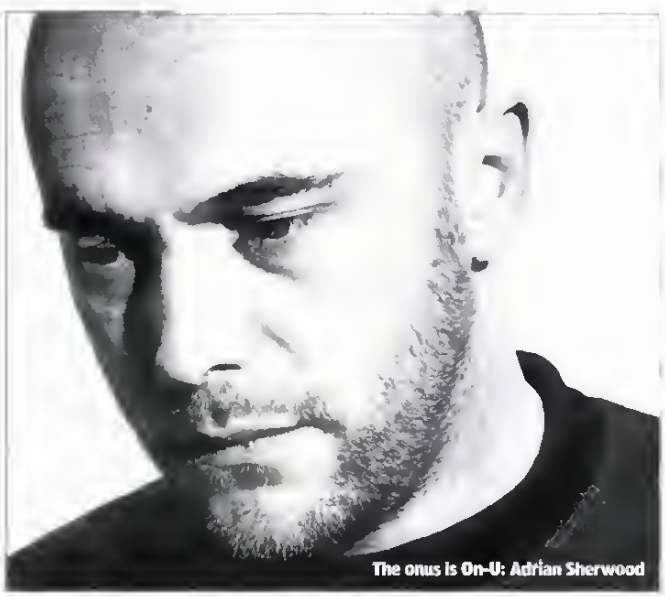
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There are a limited number of 'season tickets' available for 3 nights of the Big Chill Winter Festival at a price of £20. At the moment, these are available from www.ticketweb.co.uk
The season ticket covers one of the two nights at Union Chapel plus Saturday at 93 Feet East and Sunday at the 291 Gallery.

out there

December's selected festivals, live events, clubs and broadcasts



The onus is On-U: Adrian Sherwood

The Wire Sessions Live Dub Special

This month's *Wire* show at London's South Bank Centre, dedicated to the state of the art of dub, is headed up by the ultimate dubhead Adrian Sherwood whose Sound System will be shaking the foundations of the Queen Elizabeth Hall. One of the UK's most influential producers, Sherwood has maintained such frontline labels as On-U Sound and Pressure Sounds. He has also manned the controls for everyone from Lee 'Scratch' Perry to Gary Clail, The Fall and Little Axe. He will be releasing his first solo album in 2001. Also featured are Asian Dub Foundation's Doctor Das, Chandrasonic and Rocky Singh, plus Ghetto Priest, DJ Pete Holdsworth (Pressure Sounds), and surprise guests. London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 15 December, 7.45pm, £12.50/£10. 020 7960 4242, info from the South Bank's Website: www.sbc.org.uk

UK Festivals

American Reflections

American democracy may be in tatters, but at least the music's still in one piece. This festival features drummer Ed Thigpen, performances devoted to the American songbook, and a retrospective of the work of John Congliano. Manchester Royal Northern College of Music, 28 November–16 December, times/prices vary. 0161 907 5278

Big Chill Winter Festival

A seasonally appropriate four day chill-out extravaganza featuring Tom Middleton's Amba Electroacoustic Ensemble performing a new arrangement of Global Communications' "Db Selon Mi Nos" and a choral version of "12 18" (7 and 8 December), the Big Chill's first club night in London in four years (9), and a Sunday cinema session with a screening of Iara Lee's electronica documentary, *Modulations* (10). London various venues, 7–10 December, times/prices vary, 020 7503 9700, www.bigchill.net

Schuller At 75

The founder of the Third Stream comes to London to celebrate his 75th birthday and direct The London Sinfonietta in a retrospective of his work. London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 13 December, 7.45pm, £18–£6, 020 7960 4242

Sound Poetry Festival

A gathering of avant garde poets including Henri Chopin, Bob Cobbing, Emmett Williams, Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery of The Language Poetry Group and Australian radio producer Andrew MacLennan. Leicester De Montfort University, 8–9 December. £35/£20, 0116 257 7393, www.cta.dmu.ac.uk/cca

International Festivals

Festival Alternativa

Trans-genre festival in the Czech capital featuring such border crossers as John Zorn & Masada, Chris Cutler, Robert Poss, Zu, Jon Rose & Veryan Weston, Zend Avesta Orchestra, 33 1/3, Vershki Da Koreshki, Masfel, Trottel, Kiss Erszi Music, Ole Lukkoye, Auktyon, Zga, Francois Rosse, Laurent Dailleau, Schooner, OJ Ai and more. Czech Republic, Prague, 27 November–9 December, various venues, times/prices vary, info@tamizdat.org

Grosse Studios

Four days of new electronic and digital music at Berlin's estimable Podewil venue. The series includes a Ritornell night from Mille Plateaux's sister label (with Akira Rabelais, Autopoieses, Stephan Mathieu), audio-visual work from Phill Niblock and Reinhold Friedl and John Duncan with Carl Michael Von Hausswolff (1 December). Subsequent nights are devoted to electronic playbacks, Max and MSP software programming workshops and electroacoustic music from members of the Deutsche Gesellschaft Fur Elektroakustische Musik (DEGEM). Germany, Berlin Podewil, 1–4 December, info www.podewil.de

Christian Marclay's Sounds Of Christmas

Especially for the holiday season, Christian Marclay has collected and archived more than 1000 Christmas records for this installation and performance series. There are six videos of the album covers, and 12 turntablists have been invited to perform using only the Christmas records. Christian Marclay, Toshio Kajiwara and Darryl Hell (14 December). DJ Singe, Justin Boyd and Hahn Rowe (16), DJ Olive, Marina Rosenfeld and Chris Sattinger (23) and Sth Platoon with DJ Roli Rho, DJ Kuttin Kandi, OJ Oaddy Oog and DJ Neil Armstrong (30). USA, New York New Museum of Contemporary Art, 14–31 December, free, 001 212 219 1222, www.newmuseum.org

Mix Tape

Mixed by Jeremy Helton of Atlanta's multimedia ensemble Fascia, this installation features collaborations between musicians and video artists including Q-Bert/Syd & Eric REM/James Herbert, Scanner/DFuse and Tommy Guerrero (San Francisco). USA, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, until 30 December, 001 404 688 1970, www.thecontemporary.org

Phonomanie VI

Curated by Werner Dafeldecker, the sixth annual Austrian festival of improvised music features John Butcher, Christof Kurzmann, Burkhard Stangl, Franz Hautzinger, Dean Roberts, Boris Hegenbart, Michael Moser, Wolfgang Musil, Dieter Kovacic and Klaus Lang, among others. Austria, Ulrichsberg, Jazzatelier, 8–9 December, 7pm. Web: jazzatelier.nwy.at/index_e.html

2:13 Athens Festival

Three days of performances celebrating the launch of the London Improv club's third sister venue in Greece. Featured performers include Small Music Theater, Cranc, 2:13 Ensemble and Relay Greece. Athens 2:13, 14–16 December

Special Events

Canongate Net Radio

The book publisher launches a new online broadcasting operation (www.canongate.net) in association with Los Angeles site Dublab.com: this party featuring performances by DJs, visual artists and (of course) authors, will be Webcast live from the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. ICA, 6 December, 7pm, £5–£3. 020 7930 3647

Explorations With Sound

As part of Brighton's Field digital arts showcase, this event focuses on interactive toys and software using sound. Featured will be audio-visual designer Daniel Beattie and digital composer Felix Mood discussing their work. Brighton Sussex Arts Club, 6 December, 8–9.30pm, free. 01273 384222

Interference

The Wire's ongoing series of multimedia events moves temporarily from London's Lux Centre for a one-off date at Bristol's Cube Cinema this month. The theme 'A Night of Plunderphonia', introduced by a delegation from *The Wire*, and featuring a performance and talk by Vicki Bennett (aka People Like Us), plus a screening of Craig Baldwin's film about illegal sampling, *Sonic Outlaws*. Bristol Cube Cinema, 9 December, 7.30pm. £6/£5. 0117 907 4190



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Interference moves from London's Lux Centre to The Cube, Bristol for this one-off event featuring a live performance by People Like Us, a rare chance to see Craig Baldwin's film *Sonic Outlaws*, plus a presentation of collage and sampling by *The Wire* and Vicki Bennett

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Pants on fire: Wire

Last Of The Medicine Men

Linked to a recent BBC TV series exploring the last vestiges of shamanism trance and the spirit world British khoomi overtone singer Michael Ormiston gives a one-off concert in Central London to launch the soundtrack CD to the series, in an ensemble which also includes flautist Keith Warthe, Alquimia and Nana Appiah Writer traveller and TV presenter Benedict Allen will also be on hand to talk about his journeys beyond London St Pancras Old Church 7 December 8pm £7/£5 020 BSS8 69B2 Ormiston is also offering a course of classes in overtone singing from December through to early February Anyone wishing to drone like a Mongol should call the number above

On Stage

. . . And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead Post-rock collides with Americana in this enigmatically monickered outfit London ULU 8 December 020 7344 4444

Django Bates The pianist revisits his *Quiet Nights* album in a live setting Nottingham Djangoly Recital Hall (3 December), Cambridge Corn Exchange (B), Birmingham CBSO Centre (9) Southampton Turner Sims Concert Hall (10) Bristol Arnolfini (11) Kendal Brewery Arts Centre (13)

David Grubbs Lo-fi folk electronica from one of post-rock's prime movers Brighton Lift (29 November), Nottingham Bunkers Hill Inn (30) London Toynbee Hall (1 December) Bristol Cube Cinema (2), Glasgow 13th Note (4) Belfast Auntie Annies (6) Dublin Whelans (7) Cork Triskel Arts Centre (B)

The Fall Mark E Smith's troupe of unutterables finish off their UK tour Whitley Bay Dome (1 December), Leicester Princess Charlotte (2)

Future Perfect A trans-boundary collaboration of spoken word and music featuring Vayu Naidu the BCMG and Sarvar Sabri Leicester Richard Attenborough Centre (2 December), Bath Ustinov Studio (3) Fareham Ashcroft Arts Centre (5) London Warehouse (7) Kendal Brewery Arts Centre (B), Nottingham Djangoly Recital Hall (12), Birmingham CBSO Centre (16)

Herman Düne French/Swedish group somewhere between Palace Brothers and Serge Gainsbourg touting their new album *Turn Off The Light* (Atmospheriques) London 12 Bar (3 December), Leeds Royal Park (6) Glasgow 13th Note (7) Hull Adelphi (9), Manchester Piccadilly Records (10) Bristol Louisiana (12) London 93 Feet East (13), Brighton Lift (14) Reading Rising Sun Art Centre (16)

Kakutopia Out-there sonics from York based collective York Black Swan, 16 December, 8pm £2/£1, 01904 673519

Live Human Two dates from the excellent American turntablist/improv trio, supported by Scottish mavericks Mount Florida, playing their first ever London show Matador supremo Gerard Cosloy spins tunes between the acts Brighton Dome (4 December) London Garage (5)

Open Ear Swiss reedist Hans Koch teams up with Steve Noble Phil Minton, John Edwards Mark Wastell, Rhodri Davies and Pat Thomas for an improv throwdown London Spitz 18 December 8.30pm, £6/£4 020 7392 9032

Evan Parker Solo appearance from the legendary saxophonist London Vortex Jazz Bar 20 December £7.50 020 7254 6516

John Parrish Former PJ Harvey collaborator unveils a new 11 piece group comprised of Bristol luminaries Bristol Cube, 7 December 8pm £5 0117 907 4190

Gerard Presencer 5 London trumpeter debuts new quintet Halifax Dean Clough, 7 December 8pm £10/£8 01422 255 266

Primal Scream Rabble rousing Creation rebels Cambridge Corn Exchange (16 December) Brighton Centre (17), Bristol Colston Hall (19) Birmingham Academy (20) Manchester Apollo Theatre (22) London Alexandra Palace (31)

Scanner Robin Rimbaud's ongoing UK tour finds him collaborating with video artist Tonne in an exploration of the visual and aural landscape of each city they visit Liverpool Unity Theatre (30 November) Colchester Arts Centre (2 December), Kendal Brewery (4) Manchester Contact Theatre (7)

Patti Smith Special one-off appearance from the punk godmother in association with Tate Britain's major retrospective of William Blake which will include an acoustic performance and readings of her own works as well as Blake's London St James's Church 1 December 7pm, £16-£10 020 7887 BB88

Solesides The now renamed Quannum Projects (Blackalicious Latyrx, DJ Shadow) celebrate the release of their old label's greatest hits through Ninja Tune London Scala 6 December £10/7.50 020 7B33 2022

Karlheinz Stockhausen Second in the acoustICA series of New Music concerts This month Stockhausen's early works (*Kontakte Zyklus, Refrain*) explored by Benjamin Kobler Laszlo Hudacsaek and Zsolt Nagy then London's Contemporary Arts Ensemble performs *Kontra-Punkte* as well as works by Stephan Wolpe Claude Vivier and Sinan Savaskan London ICA 17 December, 3pm and 8pm 020 7930 3647

David Thomas & The Two Pale Boys Pere Ubu's frontman performing with cyber-folk duo Bristol Cube, 15 December, 8pm, £7/£6 0117 907 4190

DJ Vadim Ninja Tune producer brings his Russian Percussion on tour Manchester Prague 5 (5 December), Brighton (venue tbc, 6) Derby Union 1 (7) Leamington Spa Sugar (9) Birmingham PC's (10) Leeds Cockpit (11) London Scala (12) Bristol Blue Mountain (14)

Bill Wells Trio The saviour of Scottish jazz with Gentle Waves London Spitz, 1-2 December, 020 7392 9032

Wire Post-punk survivors' first Scottish show in ten years Edinburgh Queen's Hall, 8 December 7pm £10, 0131 668 2019

Young Gods Swiss Techno-rock deities return for their second UK show in five years London Queen Elizabeth Hall 4 December, £12.50, 020 7960 4242

Club Spaces

Baggage Reclaim Richard Sanderson presents his occasional night of improv and experimental musics This month avant soundtrack maestro Simon Fisher Turner Graham Halliwell & Simon Vincent's amplified instruments and Paul Hood on record players London 12 Bar Club, 17 December, 8pm £5 £4 020 8463 0490

Brown Out Club Klang and Economy Beats' nano-festival of out rock and electronica with They Came From The Stars I Saw Them, Sklent, Horton Jupiter No Copilot, Onomatopoeia, Simon Cooper, Sam Kant (Od), Charlie Orbit, Silent Soundsystem Massimo and Anil Behaviour Brighton Volks, 6 December, 10pm £5/£3 01273 6B282B

Corporate Hospitality DOT and DJ Andy Votel play at a Twisted Nerve night in the film studio once used by Alfred Hitchcock London Gainsborough Studios 2 December, £15 020 7359 2B42

Deep Funk Keb Darge's monthly night of obscure vinyl with a special live performance by New York's Sugarman Three London Jazz Cafe 3 December 7pm-midnight, 020 7344 0044

Eye Conscious Dub Sessions Night covering the full spectrum of dub culture, with the Dub Hammer Sound System and The Disciples' Wayne McArthur London Windmill, 23 December, 5-11.30pm, free

The Funk Room Rare Groove, soul jazz and general phatness spun by he of the capacious crates Keb Darge Glasgow Arches, 15 December, 11pm-3am, £8, 0141 221 4001

Future Funk Techno, drum 'n' bass and eclectica join forces to raise money for cancer charity, with Klute Percy X Paul Arnold Distorted Minds, Dazee, Task & Bear, Lurch Uberdog and Gez Bentley Bristol Depot 2 December, 10pm-6am, £10 079B0 B63 SOS

Global Beets Christmas Carnival A World Music soiree to benefit the Peace Messenger Project, with Cuban street music from Paseo Malanga high life from Nana Tsiboe's Supa Hi-Life, funk from Thumpasaurus and DJ sets from John Warr, Ghecko and Nik The Record 8nghton Corn Exchange, 22 December, 8pm-2am

HDQE The Bohman Brothers' Dada Improv night with AC Parasites and Paul Taylor (4 December), Minnow and The Bohman Brothers (11), and Frank Charlton John Edwards & Marcio Mattos and Neil Metcalfe & John Rangecroft (18) London Bonnington Centre, Mondays, 8pm, £4/£3, 01932 571323

Helvetica Special night for Swiss-French and Swiss-German electronica Tonight's session features Plastique De Rive, Person (Interdimensional Transmissions) Intricate Crowdpleaser and a variety of visuals, no doubt all running like clockwork. Glasgow Lighthouse 15 December 07946 6B4435

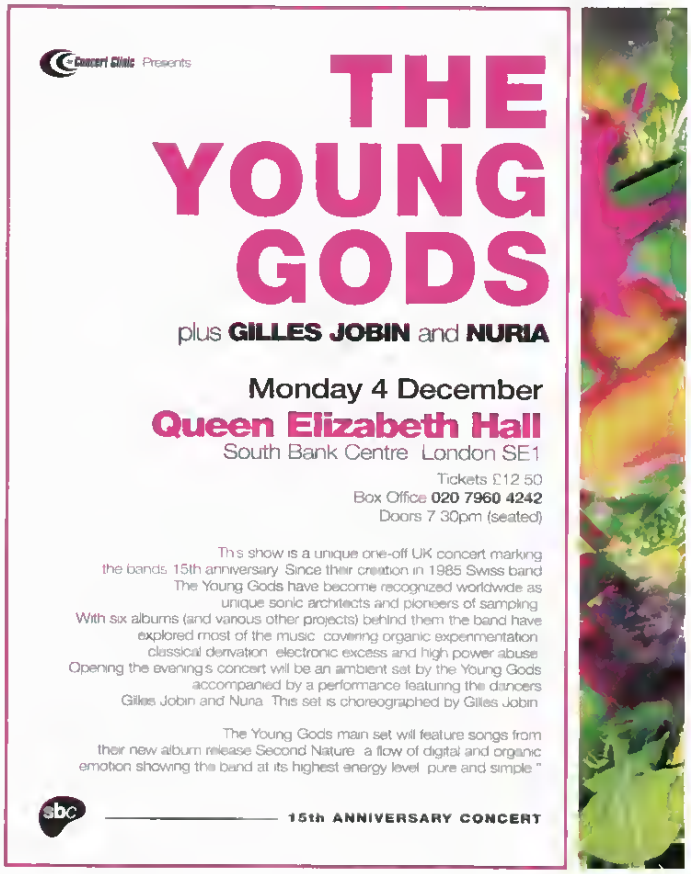
Jazz Rooms Russ Dewbury's legendary South Coast jazz sessions continue with Pete Isaac (1 December), Nik Weston (2) Bob Smith (8), Phil Asher (9), Quinton Scott (15), Pete Herbert (16), Gary Johnson (22) and Pressure Drop (23) Brighton Jazz Place, Fridays and Saturdays, 10pm-2am, £5/£4 01273 674146

Joy West Country drum 'n' bass mash-up, with Jumping Jack Frost, Mickey Finn, Nicky Blackmarket, Ray Keith, Darren Jay Rapid Kevin Deal and MC Skibba Dee 8ristol Creation, 1 December, 9.30pm-4am £10 07BB B17 7419

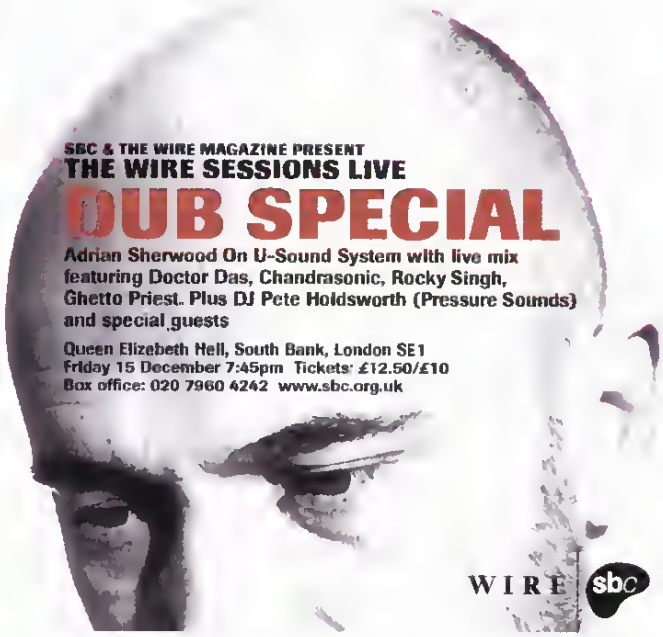
Klinker The longstanding Improv club celebrates 18 years in the biz with Mogadon, Prince Bouffants & The Conditioners Happy Fucking Birthday Neil Metcalfe & John Rangecroft and Lord & Lady Clinker (7 December), Birdyak and Skip (14), Trauma David Lester and McClapper Priest (21), Voltage (28), Paul Hill and Yumi Hara & Simon Vincent (29), and Mister Meaner & The

photo: Mark Hill





Royal Festival Hall
Queen Elizabeth Hall
Purcell Room



Vacuum Cleaner (31) London Sussex, Thursdays 020 8806 8216 www.theklinker.freeserve.co.uk

Kosmische The usual Teutonic beats 'n' pieces, plus a live performance by veteran of the Rephlex label Cylob. London Upstairs at the Garage, 16 December, 9pm, £5. 020 7607 1818

Language Launch night for a new multimedia project by Techno auteur Oliver Ho. Bristol Cube, 30 November, 7.30pm–midnight, £6, 0117 907 4190

Little Stabs At Happiness Mark Webber's night of film and art-pop celebrates its third birthday. London ICA, 16 December, 8pm, £6/£5. 020 7930 3647

Perverted Science Afro8ig8eatHipHop with The Scratch Perverts, The Funky Lowlives, Keith Tenniswood, Pete Herbert (Atlas), L (Aphratec/Cookin) and Jay 33. London 333, 15 December, 10pm–5am, £10/£6. 020 7739 5949

Pi An evening of experimental electronics, with Gescom, DAT Politics, Rex Hasselhoff, Lovewig and Electric Mammals. Bristol Platform 1, 7 December, £5. 0117 987 9700

Pressure Post-Christmas, pre-New Year slams from Gene Farris, X-Press 2 and Marco Carola. Glasgow Arches, 29 December, 10.30pm–4am, £14, 0141 221 4001

Rective Second birthday party of London's most extreme' club. London Upstairs at the Garage, 7 December, 8pm–2am, £5, 020 7607 1818

Rehabilitation Avant electronica from Spongeboy & Tench, 8lam 8lam, Position Normal, 8loom and Sgt Wilco (1 December), and Cybajaz, Pearl, Summit Sound System and Spongeboy & Tench (22). London Foundry, every third Friday, 8pm–midnight, free. 020 7739 6900

Resolution Mean Fiddler's New Year's Eve extravaganza featuring Primal Scream, Asian Dub Foundation, Liam Howlett, James Lavelle, Adrian Sherwood, Luke Slater, Jon Carter and The Psychonauts. London Alexandra Palace, 31 December, 8pm–6am, £49. 08701 500 044

ROTA Rough Trade's Saturday afternoon drinking session with the Memphis Industries and Melodic labels featuring 8lue States, Minotaur Shock, Pedro and 8roadway Project. London Notting Hill Arts Club, 2 December, 4–8pm, free. 020 7460 4459

Scratch Rob Swift heads up a turntablist dream team including residents Matt Smooth, Rob Mac, Richy Rich & DJ Fip, and more, plus the usual graffiti art and dynamic dancing. London Scala, 7 December, 9pm–3am, £8/£6. 020 7833 2022

The Shrine Peripatetic Afrobeat club with Rita Ray, Nikki Lucas and Max Reinhardt. London Cargo, 2 December, 8pm–1am, £5. 020 7739 3440

Soundscape Monthly mix of Ambient-ish sound and visuals. This month's guest is Osymyso, plus Sleep Walker (ex-Mellowtrons) and Ron Devon. London New Inn, EC1, 2 December, 8–11pm, £3, 0961 303156

The Sprawl Eclectic electronic space, this month featuring Si 8egg, Damien Lazarus, Elixir, 8itTonic and Si-[cut]-db. London Global Cafe, 14 December, 7.30pm–midnight, £3/£2. 020 7287 2242

Sub Dub Heavyweight dubplate soundclash pitting Iration Steppas against The Disciples. Leeds West Indian Centre, 9 December, 10pm–3am, £5, 0113 262 9465

Sunday Distorted ambience from Techno Animal collaborator Carthage. Bristol Arc 8ar, 10 December, 6–11pm, donation, 01275 464600

Sunday Social @ The Arches Scottish date for electronic songsmiths Hefner, Voigt Kampff and DJ Sidewinder, plus trippy visuals from VJ Tapehead. Glasgow Arches, 3 December, 3–11pm, £3 (before 5pm)/£5, 0141 221 4001

Urban Development DJ Pogo presents a night of Old School HipHop with guests Phife Dawg (the Tribe Called Quester's first UK appearance), and playas from The Lyrical Lounge. London Scala, 5 December, 9pm–3am, £10. 020 7833 2022

Vapour Glasgow's premier Techno night features funk-House minimalist Kenny Dixon Jr aka Moodymann, New Yorkers Mateo and Matos, and reps from the local Glasgow Underground label. Glasgow Arches, 1 December, 10pm–4am, £14, 0141 221 4001

Incoming

Japanorama Otomo Yoshihide curates this touring celebration of the Japanese underground which showcases musical approaches ranging from avant rock to improv, skewed pop and noise. Performers include Oshima Haco, Sachiko M, Taku Sugimoto, Toshimaru Nakamura and classical players Ko Ishikawa and Mari Furuta, all playing in shifting combinations. Exeter Phoenix (12 January), Brighton Pavilion (13), Colchester Arts Centre (14), Liverpool Unity Theatre (16), London Queen Elizabeth Hall (17), Manchester Contact Theatre (18), Oxford Playhouse (19), Sheffield National Centre For Popular Music (20), Kendal 8rewery Arts Centre (21). Info www.cmntours.org.uk

David Johansen & The Harry Smiths Former New York Doll plays his first dates in the UK for more than ten years, along with his peculiarly titled group — a homage to the American Country blues tradition — featuring jazzers Kermit Driscoll and Joey 8aron, no less, as well as 8rian Koonin. Leicester Princess Charlotte (24 January), London Forum (27), Ireland, Dublin Whelans (30), Galway Roisin Dubh (31)

Out There items for inclusion in the January issue should reach us by Friday 8 December. Fax 020 7287 4767, e-mail news@thewire.co.uk ***NB Listings information MUST include a contact phone number, start time and ticket price. Listings cannot be taken over the phone***

Radio

National

BBC Radio 1 97-99 FM

John Peel *Tuesdays–Thursdays 10pm–midnight* The now venerable mix of rock, indie, Techno, Jungle, Electronica, dub and the legendary sessions

Gilles Peterson *Wednesdays midnight–2am* Up- and downtempo beats, experimental drum 'n' bass, funk, psychedelic soul and plenty more in between

Fabio & Grooverider *Fridays 2–4am* Two hours of vanguard drum 'n' bass from two of the scene's longest serving DJs

Westwood Rap Show *Fridays 11pm–2am/Saturdays 9pm–midnight* Tim's fast breaking HipHop tips

BBC Radio 3 90-93 FM

Late Junction *Monday–Thursday 10.15–midnight* Verity Sharp and Fiona Talkington present news and discussion of a diverse musical selection

Jazz Legends *Fridays 4–5pm* Archive recordings and interviews presented by Julian Joseph

Jazz Line-Up *Saturdays 4–5pm* Jazz magazine programme presented by Stacey Kent and Claire Martin

Jazz File *Saturdays 6–6.30pm* Jazz documentary series

Mixing It *Saturdays 10.45–11.30pm* New music mix with Robert Sandall and Mark Russell

Jazz On 3 *Saturdays 11.30pm–1am* Modern jazz in session and concert. This month: Howard Riley (2 December), John McLaughlin (9)

World Routes *Sundays, 11.15pm–midnight* New World Music magazine programme, hosted by Lucy Duran with regular guest Andy Kershaw

Regional

BBC Lancashire 95.5/103.9/104.5 FM, 855 MW

On The Wire *Saturdays 8–10pm* The Wire's resident dub columnist Steve Barker mixes dub, experimental electronics, out rock, free jazz, World Music and more

BBC Merseyside 95.8 FM, 1485 MW

PMS *Sundays midnight–2am* Formerly *The Late World Noise*, Roger Hill's mix of avant rock, psychedelia, warped Ambient and global gems in themed sequences

BBC Scotland 92.4-94.7 FM

From Bebop To HipHop *Wednesdays 8–9pm* David Sillars drops jazz and new beats

Beat Patrol *Sundays 8–9pm* Peter Aston plays independent music across the spectrum

Cable Radio 89.8 FM (Milton Keynes)

The Garden Of Earthly Delights *Fridays 10pm–midnight* Shane Quentin's blend of avant rock to electronic exotica, with bizarre soundbites

Kiss 100 FM (London)

Patrick Forge *Sundays 10pm–midnight* Eclectic jazz-not-jazz mix

Frost and Hype *Sunday/Monday midnight–2am* Breakbeats, Jungle, drum 'n' bass

Slipmatt & Friends *Mondays 2–4am* Jazz Jungle, cyber-soul breakbeats and electrified grooves from this lively bunch

Andy C, Kenny Ken, LTJ Bukem and Ray Keith *Wednesdays 2–4am* Drum 'n' bass

London Live 94.9 FM

Destination In *Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays 10pm–midnight* Ross Allen spins a motley selection of new music, from spacey jazz and minimalism to electronica and leftfield pop

Solid Steel *Mondays midnight–2am* The Ninja Tune posse's tasty stew of funk, jazz, brakes and beats seasoned with nutty speech bites

Charlie Gillett *Saturdays 8–10pm* Rock, roots, dub, World Music, blues, R&B and more

Surf 107 FM (Brighton)

Totally Wired *Daily 11pm–1am* Eclectic selection of leftfield independent/dance tunes, laced with 60s/70s flashbacks

The Chill Factor *Sundays 5–7am* Clive Craske's continuous mix of drum 'n' bass, dub, HipHop, classical, electronica and more

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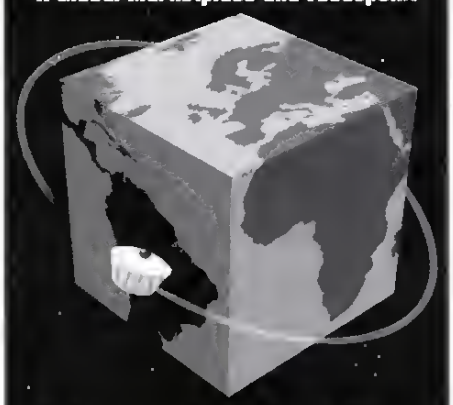
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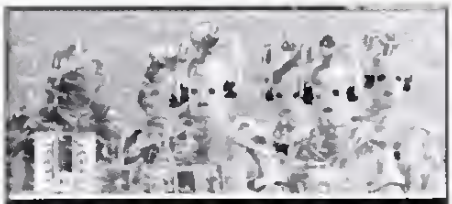
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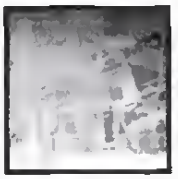
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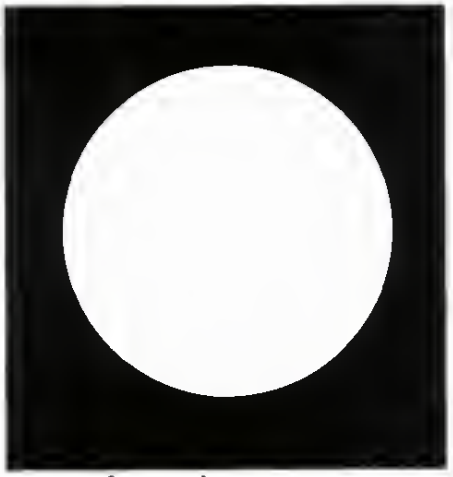
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THE WIRE

epiphanies

Adrian Shaughnessy has a once in a Lifetime experience with Tony Williams's electric fusion

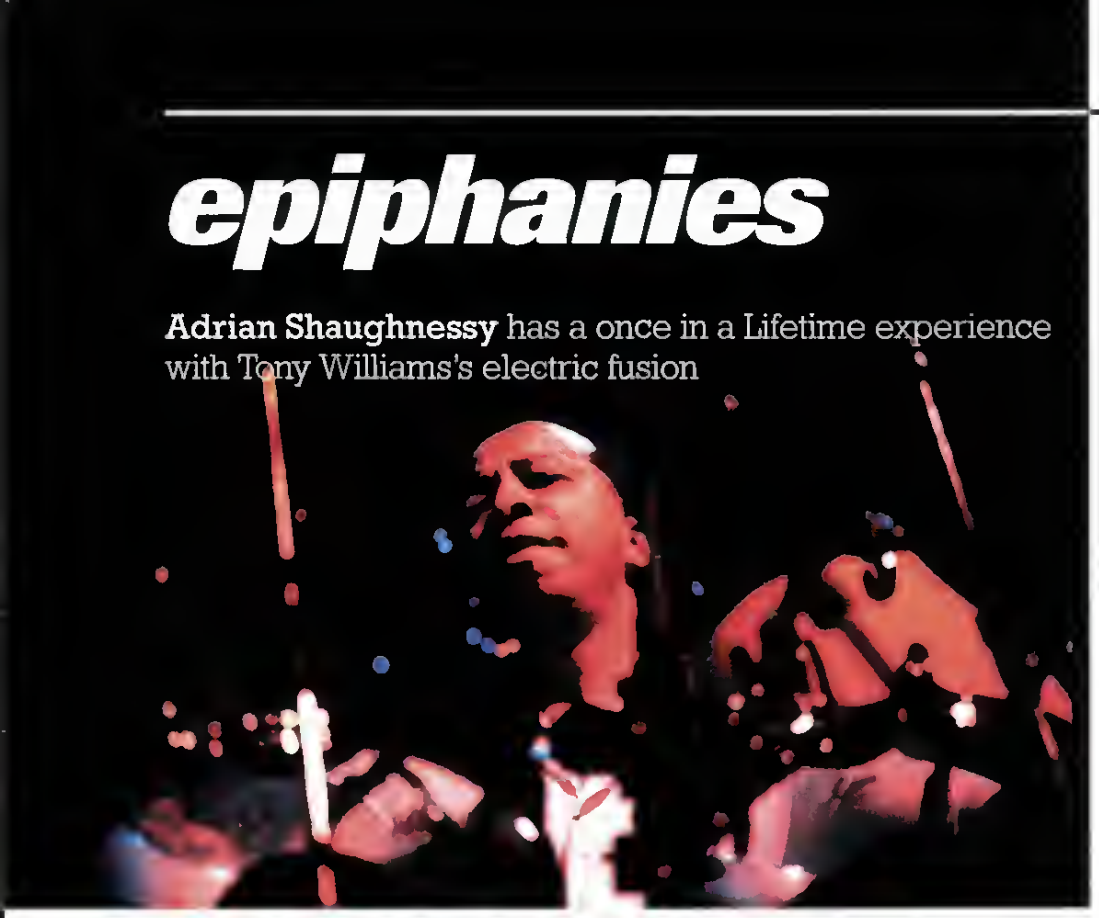


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It was the drumming that finally weaned me off hard rock. Like many schoolboys in the late 60s, my musical life revolved around the posturings of skinny youths with screaming guitars — the sort of musicians I first heard on John Peel's *Top Gear*, or read about amidst the Dayglo splutterings of the underground press. But I was slowly coming to the realisation that rock, with its over-reliance on leaden tub thumping, was a cul de sac. I sensed that there were other musics, other worlds, other possibilities. But where?

I grew up in a remote part of Scotland, and finding interesting records was hard work. Record shops usually doubled as electrical goods retailers, and stocked only the Top Ten and a ragbag of Scottish music that suggested Caledonian musical taste was still defined by Harry Lauder. Unusual records — weird stuff — had to be bought by mail order. Charles Lloyd's *Love-In* was an early discovery. Recorded live at the Fillmore West, it had Jack DeJohnette on drums — all bristling propulsion and clean rhythmic lines — and emphatically signposted my road ahead.

I came across DeJohnette again on *Bitches Brew*, an album I first heard on AFN, the US armed forces radio network which broadcast to American troops stationed in Europe. ("And now, a track from the new Miles Davis album, the title changed for broadcasting purposes to *Witches Brew*".) *Bitches Brew* led me to the previous year's *In A Silent Way*, where I discovered Tony Williams, who seemed even sharper on the kit than DeJohnette. Between them and the seething cauldron of Miles's keyboard driven funk, those albums opened up vistas of rhythmic possibility and provided a real alternative to the turgidity of rock.

Gig going was as problematical as record buying. I lived 30 miles from Edinburgh, and catching groups live was largely dependent on the local bus service. When the skinny guitarists made their occasional visits to Scotland's capital, I was invariably forced to leave before the end if I was to catch the last bus home and avoid spending the night in a bus shelter. Despite this, and other impediments, I managed to see enough guitar mangling groups to confirm my suspicion that rock was not the Valhalla most of my generation thought it was.

In the autumn of 1970, The Tony Williams Lifetime came to town. The Lifetime line-up offered an intoxicating blend of rock swagger and jazz precision, and a glimpse of what the groups of the future might sound like as rock and jazz cross-pollinated.

Their most famous member was Jack Bruce, whose keening vocals and 'contrapuntal basslines' (as the lofty-browed reviewers of the time described them) had made him by far the most interesting member of Cream. Only slightly less famous was John McLaughlin, another *Bitches Brew* alumnus, whose slashing, resonant guitar sonics hung over the group like sheet lightning (his 1969 album *Extrapolation* was another of my significant discoveries). In Larry Young, Lifetime had a further link with Miles, and his organ added some of the keyboard squelch that made *Bitches Brew* so immersive. And finally Williams himself, a drummer who sounded like ten thousand insects tap dancing on a tin roof, and whose expressive rhythmic bite effortlessly transcended the foursquare thud of rock.

The Lifetime gig was to transform more than my musical horizons, in fact, it was to have an unforeseen and cataclysmic effect on my post-adolescent life. The gig was on a Sunday night, the least convenient time to do anything in sabbatarian Scotland, a time when a huge black cloud of torpor settled over the entire country and when the bus network was at its most unaccommodating. But, with a friend (he was the ideal companion, he always carried a John Surman album around with him) I arrived at the venue in the heart of the dour capital, sensing that this was to be some sort of musical rite of passage, a moment of revelation. All we had to do, as I constantly reminded my friend, was to leave early to catch the last bus home.

The group surged and raged like a juggernaut on a skidpan. They eclipsed every other live act I had previously seen. The sheer exoticism of the music wormed its way into my nascent musical consciousness. This was real music. So compelling in fact, that the clock was forgotten, and we became transfixed by the huge life-affirming energy rush of Lifetime. We stayed until the roadies switched off the speaker cabinets and the red lights faded out. We stayed until the last bus had been returned to its depot, the engine turned off and the driver gone home to bed.

My friend had a grown-up sister living nearby. We slept on her floor, planning to catch the first bus in the morning and to be in school by 9am. But we overslept, and instead of getting on the first bus of the day, we caught a mid-morning one which we took to just beyond the Edinburgh suburbs — those middle class gulags with faux-Baronial architecture and heather-clad gardens that mark the point where the prim city ends and the raw countryside begins. From here, we would hitch a lift and, with luck, be home by lunchtime.

As we trudged through a cold Scottish morning, two cars approached, travelling towards us in the opposite direction. The vehicles slowed as they drew level and I realised, in a moment of icy dread, that we were looking into the eyes of the entire senior teaching staff of our school: every head of every department, every bloody one of them. As the cars crawled past, the occupants stared sullenly at us. They didn't stop. They didn't look back. They just drove past. In slow motion. Dreamlike.

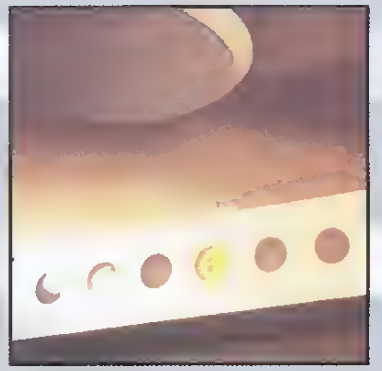
Later, we discovered that the school's departmental heads were on their way to attend the funeral of a previous headmaster. For me, this unlikely encounter was to prove disastrous. My appearance on a stretch of road outside Edinburgh, at a time when I should have been in school, was a misdemeanour too far. I was already on a sort of academic bail as punishment for running an underground school magazine called *Fugg* (named after the East Village musical insurrectionists The Fugs). When I returned the next day, I was expelled.

As my friends dispersed to universities and colleges around the country, I stayed locked in my bedroom, caught in a downcurrent of parental dismay, mild depravity and pharmaceutical self-recrimination. Eventually, I sold my record collection, and took the long road south to London, never to return. In fact, I caught the overnight bus, taking with me only a few favourite albums. *Emergency!* by The Tony Williams Lifetime was amongst them. *Adrian Shaughnessy is co-founder and Creative Director of London graphic design company Intro (www.intro-uk.com)*



Holger Hiller 'Holger Hiller'

The seminal post-punk noise terrorist s most accomplished LP to date (Uncut)



Echoboy 'Volume 2'

The new album from Echoboy has delighted and confused critics who ve compared him to Stereolab Kraftwerk and Faust Progressive dynamic, energetic innovative this is his strongest collection of songs to date



Goldfrapp 'Felt Mountain'

'Utterly sublime..Brilliant. Astonishing. We are not worthy (Time Out)
'Stunning. A must. (Muzik)
'Gorgeous pop-noir (Uncut)



Einsturzende Neubauten 'Silence Is Sexy'

Blixa Bargeld s noise experimentalists celebrate 20 years with a new album, displaying moments of great beauty and unnerving clarity (Q)



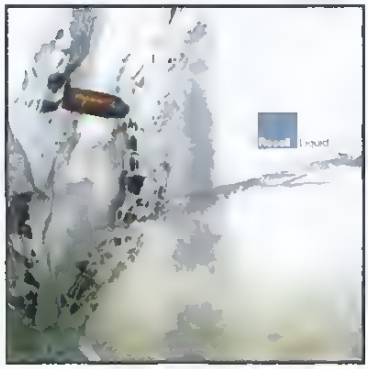
Various 'Plus 8 Classics'

The Plus 8 label is recognised as one of the truly great electronic imprints of the 90 s This album brings together some of its groundbreaking releases, including tracks from Plastikman Speedy J Kenny Larkin and Cybersonik



Christian Vogel 'Rescate 137'

A string of acclaimed releases for the likes of Tresor and Mille Plateaux has secured Vogel s position as one of the leading figures in European techno From fluid beats to freeform electronics, his first NovaMute LP shifts through a myriad of styles



Recoil Liquid

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